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**Tolerance Implementation Meeting on Promoting Inter-Cultural, Inter-Religious and Inter-Ethnic Understanding  
Almaty, 12-13 June 2006**

**CANADIAN DELEGATION STATEMENT  
Head of Delegation: Ambassador Barbara Gibson**

*Session II: inter-cultural, inter-religious and inter-ethnic partnerships as a tool to counter stereotypes and prejudice and to promote mutual respect and understanding in public and political discourse*

Allow me to begin by extending our deep thanks to the Government of Kazakhstan for hosting this event. By hosting this event, the Kazakh Government demonstrates its commitment to pluralism and respect for diversity.

Canada is pleased to participate in this event as we believe that inter-cultural, inter-religious and inter-ethnic understanding and dialogue are keys to our common goal of mutual respect and understanding. This event provides us with an important opportunity to consolidate further the work that OSCE participating States, in partnership with civil society, are doing towards this goal.

Canada is a firm believer that only through genuine intercultural dialogue can we develop the tools and policies to address, and effectively counter, racism, xenophobia, and discrimination.

We wish to acknowledge the efforts of the Kazakh Government, the OSCE, and the Belgian Chairman-in-Office, in ensuring an impressive level of participation by local NGOs in this event and we applaud this effort. We have taken careful note of the participating NGOs extensive and concrete recommendations to the participating States and the OSCE and thank them for their efforts.

Recent international events have demonstrated a greater need to reach across the divides of culture, religion, race and ethnicity to foster understanding of diversity and respect.

Canada remains committed to supporting and contributing to OSCE efforts to address this need. In particular, we highly value the pioneering work of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) under its Tolerance and Non-Discrimination programme.

ODIHR's work in the areas of legislation, data collection, education and law enforcement is to be commended. The support provided to civil society to strengthen monitoring and reporting capacities on the implementation of OSCE tolerance related commitments is also a very important objective of the Programme.

We wish to recommend that future ODIHR activities continue to be comprehensive in nature and take a concrete approach to address all manifestations of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and work to eliminate discrimination based on gender, age, and disability.

Canada looks forward to further developing partnerships both within and through the OSCE with a view to strengthening our fight against all forms of discrimination, and ensuring compliance with international commitments in this area.

I am pleased to report that Canada is taking innovative steps in the area of using inter-cultural, inter-religious and inter-ethnic partnerships as a tool to counter stereotypes and prejudice and to promote mutual respect and understanding in public discourse. It is for this reason that several of our federal departments support a number of national and regional community-based projects across the country that foster cross-cultural understanding.

For a country as diverse as Canada is, it is important for the Government to reach out to a broad spectrum of Canadian society. It is equally important to connect with the roots of these diverse cultural groups around the world.

For example, in 2005, Canada established a Muslim Communities Working Group within its Department of Foreign Affairs in recognition of the considerable focus on Muslim communities in recent years. It is similar to structures established by some of our European counterparts in that it provides policy inputs to work with Muslim communities. In this

way we are better informed of our sometimes varied perspectives in order to address common challenges of democratization, good governance, human rights, and integration. This work is informed by and helps to further develop our rich experience in pluralism and multiculturalism.

Canada also sees the important connections between inter-cultural dialogue and security matters. As a result, in 2005, Canada established a *Cross-Cultural Roundtable on Security* in order to engage Canadians from diverse communities and the Government of Canada in a long-term dialogue on national security matters.

The Roundtable brings together citizens who are leaders in their respective communities with Government officials. Together they focus on and discuss emerging developments in national security issues and their impact on Canadian society.

In this way, the Roundtable provides uniquely developed advice and perspectives to the Government on matters of national security, which in turn helps to build inter-cultural and inter-religious understanding.

We know that there is still much work to be done and will continue to involve and work with community and voluntary organizations to build capacity, strengthen ethno cultural, ethno-racial and religious communities, and enhance inter-cultural and inter-faith understanding in order to counter intolerance, prejudice and discrimination.