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Session I: Combating intolerance and discrimination against Muslims

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Dear President,
Distinguished Representatives
Esteemed Experts
And NGO Representatives,

There is an increasing trend in anti-Muslim sentiment in many OSCE participating States, especially in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in 2001 and 2005. This trend is now evident in public discourse, including the field of media and politics. Negative portrayals of Muslims, stereotypes and prejudices towards Muslims create a general climate of mistrust, fear and hostility towards Muslim communities in the territories they are used to live in. This is a serious challenge for many OSCE participating States that they have to manage in their multicultural and multi-faith societies.

While there is an estimated population of 20 million Muslims across the OSCE region, the increasing anti-Muslim sentiment in public and political discourse in many states is a serious concern for the Muslims of Europe. This rising Islamophobia leads the erosion of fundamental rights and freedoms, and religious discrimination and questions over identity and civic belonging are issues of concern in the OSCE region.

Incidences of discrimination have been widespread in many OSCE region, including Greece. Increase in hostility and discrimination against Muslims and Islamophobia is manifested in different ways. Violent manifestations of intolerance motivated by hatred against Muslims are perpetrated against individuals, their property or propagated on the Internet.

The Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, which is the only officially recognized minority by the Greek State, is being threatened and feared by incidents of violence and attacks motivated by hatred. On 27 June 2009, the drinking fountain on the name of Mehmet Hilmi, teacher and

founder of the Xanthi Turkish Union, was attacked by unidentified persons. The drinking fountain which was being built by Seçek Minority Education and Culture Association in the Seçek Plateau in Mehriköz subdistrict in Rhodope, where traditional Seçek Oil Wrestling Festival is held, had a poet written in Turkish dedicated to Mehmet Hilmi on its marble, which was destroyed during the attack. On 27 June 2009, *Hronos*, had a heading “Seçek Culture Association is building a provocative and illegal monument” and stated that “The Mehmet Hilmi Fountain was being built on the honour of the Greek enemy who struggled for Turkfying the Minority”. The same night, the fountain was attacked and the marble was partially destroyed. A second against the Mehmet Hilmi Fountain took place, and the marble was damaged. The word “Alevites” was written to the other parts of the fountain. A third attack against the Mehmet Hilmi Fountain took place, and upper parts of the wall on which the marble lie were destroyed.

On 2 September 2009, an arson attack took place against the Okçular (Toxotes) Village Mosque, and the fire damaged interior carpets, the engine of air conditioner and part of the roof. Besides lusters, timber panels, pulpit, the book of Qur’an and the stone nish were also damaged in the fire. Police officers, who inspected the crime scene, ascertained the occurrence as an incendiary action and stated that unidentified person or persons spoiled gasoline on the mosque carpets, after removing the iron railings and breaking a window to entry the mosque. This was the third time the mosque had been attacked since 2004, each time prior to national elections. During the general elections of 2004, the mosque was set on fire for the first time on 7th March and as a result completely burned down. The second incendiary action took place in 2007, and now on the day of the early election announcement of Greece for the 4th of October 2009, the mosque became a place of vandalism again.

On 5 September 2009, the Ramadan drummer of Koyunköy, a province of Xanthi, was attacked by an armed Greek while he was waiting for the drum playing time. Karaosman, who went to the police for appeal, was accused by the Greek perpetrator and detained by the Greek police for six hours.

The problem of reporting is another question in many OSCE states. Many participating States do not collect data on hate crimes consistently at national level. The Fundamental Rights Agency has noted that the authorities in Greece do not provide any data on hate crimes. ABTTF would like to suggest that reporting should not be left only to police agencies, but that NGOs should play a role in monitoring incidents and providing alternative data sources. NGOs could play a more user-friendly interface for community members impacted by hate crime.

In light of the above information, ABTTF calls the OSCE participating States:

- To ensure that relevant national legislation applies also to racist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim offences and prosecute those responsible for this kind of offences;
- To set up of a national consultation body this acts as a permanent monitoring centre and increase public awareness of the problem of the dissemination of incitement to hatred.
- To encourage continued and increased efforts by NGOs to monitor and their efforts to fight against intolerant discourse among societies they live in.