

Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2007

Working Session 2 (specifically selected topic):

Combating intolerance and discrimination and promoting mutual respect and understanding - implementation of commitments

INTERVENTION

by the Delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan

Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear colleagues,

At the outset, we would like to thank the OSCE Spanish Chairmanship for placing special emphasis on the issues of fighting intolerance and discrimination and promoting mutual respect and understanding. We particularly welcome the decision of the Spanish Chairmanship to hold a conference on Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims in Cordoba on 9-10 October 2007. In the times when we witness negative trends against Muslims in some countries, such events are very important.

We would also like to commend the activity of distinguished Personal Representatives of the Chairman-in-Office on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination in raising the profile of the OSCE's fight against such negative phenomena as intolerance and discrimination. We do appreciate their constant support to the participating States in the effective implementation of their relevant OSCE commitments.

We highly value the work done by ODIHR, through its Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Program and express our support to its further activities in promoting tolerance and fighting discrimination and xenophobia. In particular, we appreciate the intention of the Office to assist national initiatives to intensify educational programmes on diversity education and readiness to support the development of relevant educational and resource materials, aimed at increasing of understanding of the diverse aspects of Islam and Muslim life and culture in the OSCE region.

Distinguished Delegates,

With its location at the crossroads of different cultures, Azerbaijan has benefited from the values of both Eastern and Western civilizations. Azerbaijan has become home to people with diverse ethnic origins and religious affiliations, who have been living here through the centuries in a spirit of "harmony in difference", as the UNESCO 1995 Declaration defines tolerance. Having a rich heritage of multi-

dimensional and multi-cultural elements in its social tissue and being a democratic and secular state, Azerbaijan has used its historical experience and made its own contribution to inter-religious and intercultural dialogue and confirmed its adherence to this process.

Without tolerance and mutual understanding, no partnership among cultures and religions is possible. Establishing such partnerships requires dialogue and concrete actions, which should be based upon respect for and knowledge about each other.

In this respect, the role of media is extremely important. The media can and should provide opportunities for all of us to learn about each others' cultures and beliefs. It has to avoid stereotypes and gross distortions, which foster intolerance and the frequent belittling of religions and cultures. Instead it should promote inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue. Guided by that strong belief, the Republic of Azerbaijan hosted an International Conference on the Role of Media in the Development of Tolerance and Mutual Understanding in April 2007. The Conference which brought together officials from many governments and international organizations, members of parliaments, representatives of public and private media and NGOs prominent experts in media development concluded that holding such events on a regular basis will enhance and promote the process of mutual understanding between religions and civilizations.

Education is another very essential tool in diminishing prejudice and negative stereotyping. We share fully the view stated in the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance that "Education is the most effective means of preventing intolerance. The first step in tolerance education is to teach people what their shared rights and freedoms are, so that they may be respected and to promote the will to protect those of others".

In this regard, let me particularly mention the importance to develop relevant educational policies with special focus on youth forums and educational institutions, which must be encouraged to organize seminars on the concept of dialogue for fostering awareness and understanding for the younger generation in order to prevent them from being motivated by the extremists and propagators of intolerance.

Strengthening mutual respect and understanding through education has been an integral element in the fruitful cooperation between Azerbaijan and the ODIHR in recent times. ODIHR, which sent a needs assessment mission to Azerbaijan in March 2007, upon the request of the Azerbaijani authorities, produced a report currently elaborated by the relevant state institutions of Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan stands ready and committed to further the cooperation with this OSCE institution on this very substantial field.

To conclude, Mr. Moderator, we are convinced that by consolidating our efforts in implementation of the programs in the field of education, information and cultural

dialogue aimed at further facilitating mutual respect and tolerance, understanding and trust, we will eventually find solutions to many existing or emerging problems and challenges, thus fostering greater tolerance.