



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Arab League Secretary General Amr Moussa

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
April 17, 2008

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We join other participating States in welcoming Amr Moussa, Secretary General of the League of Arab States, to the Permanent Council this morning. While the OSCE does not have many opportunities to deal with the Arab League, or with the Middle East in general, it does have considerable contact with some of the Arab League members through its Mediterranean Partnership.

The OSCE, as the only organization representing all the states of Europe and Central Asia and the trans-Atlantic community, provides an umbrella under which OSCE participating States meet Mediterranean Partner States. The growing inter-connectedness of the Mediterranean as a region means that developments in the OSCE region impact upon security in the Mediterranean, and vice versa. Central Asia, Europe, America, North Africa and the Middle East have common interests on which to build.

The OSCE provides a neutral forum for the Mediterranean Partners to enhance dialogue and cooperation through the Contact Group and with other OSCE events. We urge our Partners to make full use of this forum to increase understanding and build confidence among and between the countries of the region.

The OSCE's concept of comprehensive security would seem particularly relevant in the Middle East, where insecurity due to internal and cross-border conflict has threatened and thwarted progress in human rights. Human rights and democracy are closely linked and are essential to long-term stability and security. Democracies, based on respect for human rights, provide political incentives for governments to allow for more informed and extensive policy dialogue, which provides an advantage in preventing and managing conflict. We have seen that states that severely and systematically violate the human rights of their own people are more likely to pose threats to neighboring countries and the international community.

We need initiatives where we can seek cooperation and provide opportunities to build mutual understanding and confidence to approach today's difficult security issues. One of the major challenges that confronts us all is the management of multi-ethnic societies is diversity, whether of ethnicity or of religion. As our world gets smaller, our cultures interconnect, and demographics change, our societies become more diverse. That diversity brings with it many tangible rewards, but also new challenges on how to promote inter-religious and inter-ethnic tolerance and understanding. While some OSCE countries have a good record in this area, there is always room for improvement. We have made serious efforts to work actively and share experiences and best practices with our Mediterranean Partners. In that regard, we welcome the formation of the Partnership Fund as a way to fund worthwhile projects in those countries in support of OSCE commitments.

Many of the OSCE's key commitments have been in the areas of counter-terrorism and human rights. We have sought to work with our Mediterranean partners and others throughout the globe against the threat of violence by committing ourselves to marginalizing violent extremists and confronting their ideology of hate. As you know, recent years have seen a dramatic rise in violent, even terrorist acts perpetrated in the name of Islam. In the long run, defeating these violent extremists requires an alternative to their murderous ideology. One of the best ways to defeat their ideology is to amplify the voices of mainstream Muslims, as the embodiment of an alternative vision.

Within the OSCE region, we seek to empower mainstream voices and to demonstrate respect for all ethnic and religious communities, including those of the Islamic faith. Promoting freedom of thought and freedom of religion is essential in this regard. As participating States and Partner countries, we all are fortunate to have the opportunity to work together within the OSCE in pursuit of these goals.

We hope to strengthen our work with our Mediterranean partners in these areas. We again thank Secretary General Moussa for joining us today and hope his visit here was useful.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.