

**Statement by the  
Personal Representative of the Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE on  
combating intolerance and discrimination against Muslims,  
Ambassador Vyacheslav Gizzatov**

**At the Scientific Practical conference “Kazakhstani experience of  
international and inter-confessional concord: proposals for the OSCE”  
(Almaty, 25 February 2009)**

**Title: “The Personal Representative of the Chairman-in-Office of the  
OSCE and his role in combating intolerance and discrimination  
against Muslims”**

Dear Chairman!  
Dear Colleagues!

Since the beginning of the OSCE activities the so-called “human dimension”, which means the natural interrelation between the respect of the human rights, including freedom of faith, and international security, was one of the major directions of the activities of the Organization, where the accent was made to the combating against intolerance and discrimination.

Within the scope of the overall fight against intolerance and discrimination the activities of the Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE in this sphere and coordination of joint efforts have being provided by the Personal Representatives on tolerance, especially with regard to the main three religions – Christianity, Islam and Judaism. The OSCE Chairman-in-Office, whose position this year is occupied by Greece, has honoured me to give the portfolio of the Personal Representative on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims in the OSCE region.

The mechanism of the Personal Representative of the Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE has been introduced in December 2004 by the proposal of the Bulgarian Chairmanship. The mandate of the Personal Representative is reconsidered annually by the new Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE, approved and extended for one year or, by his decision, the new Personal Representative will be appointed. Before my appointment this honorary position was occupied by Ambassador Omur

Orhun who during 4 years did a great and useful work and left invaluable heritage for his successors.

My mandate as the Personal Representative of the Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims envisages promotion of better coordination of participating States' efforts, exactly, in full and effective implementation of the OSCE Ministerial and Permanent Council's relevant decisions on intolerance and discrimination, and cooperation with the Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE on struggle against intolerance.

Besides, this mandate means the interaction with the other Personal Representatives of the Chairman-in-Office for the purposes of full implementation of their duties, cooperation with the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) to strengthen mutual efforts and with the other OSCE institutions, including the Representative on Freedom in Mass Media, the High Commissioner on National Minorities, the OSCE Secretariat, and the relevant international organizations and the NGOs. My responsibilities also include the preliminary consultations on planning activities and the regular reporting to the Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE and to the Permanent Council.

The implementation of the mandate includes the country visits to the OSCE states, accepting invitations extended by the governments of these countries, to study the situation pertaining Muslims, carrying out the comparative analysis. These visits programmes include the meetings with the high-level representatives of government and the state, but also leaders of relevant institutions and, more importantly, large segments of the civil society.

The investigation of the problem of discrimination and intolerance against Muslims in the OSCE states shows that one of the main modern challenges are the growing "Islamofobia" and prejudices, leading to extremism, violence and further inter-religious demarcation.

In spite of tangible progress achieved in eliminating institutionalized forms of discrimination, OSCE countries are still experiencing new and growing waves of bias, exclusion, and racist violence.

There is still strong antipathy towards Muslims in general, and a belief that Islam is not compatible with democracy, human rights, and contemporary values, identification of terrorism and violence with Islam, which strengthened in the post-September 11 period. Moreover, the situation is fuelled time to time by the political “anti-Muslim” rhetoric and discourses of some political figures, coupled with biased and misleading media coverage.

Discrimination and intolerance against Muslims is not only a matter of discrimination against a specific religious group but also deeply affects international relations, thus, imposing the acute necessity of searching the improvement of the traditional ways of struggle against all forms and manifestations of discrimination and intolerance against Muslims. The solution of these difficult problems on elimination of different forms of discrimination demands joint actions of the Participating States, the European Union, in particular, the main OSCE institutions.

One of the key issues of the internal and external policy of Kazakhstan is maintaining of the open, inter-cultural dialogue and participation in the international activities on combating the manifestations of ethnic, cultural, religious intolerance and its extreme forms such as terrorism. Kazakhstan being the multi-ethnic society, where 70% are Muslims and 25% - Christians, is one of the initiators of consistent development of the dialogue among civilizations, cultures and religions in Central Asian region. Kazakhstan closely cooperates with the UN and OSCE in this sphere, and these organizations highly appraised the national policy of the country.

Holding the First Summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) in 2002 and adopting the Almaty Act and the Declaration on Elimination of Terrorism and Promotion of the Dialogue among Civilizations - the first in the Asian continent documents, bringing substantive contribution into maintaining of security and inter-cultural dialogue at the regional and global level witnesses this.

Holding the traditional forums of the leaders of the world and traditional religions reflects the growing role of Kazakhstan in the global inter-civilized and cultural processes, becoming the site for the dialogue among the leaders of world confessions. The activities of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan, chaired by the President of the country, is valuable and positive experience in the achievement of the stable development of multiethnic society. All important decisions of internal policy are adopted under the coordination of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan.

My predecessor at the post of the Personal Representative of the Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE, Ambassador Orhun visited Kazakhstan in October 2008 and noted that Kazakhstan is the multi-ethnic country, where no hate crime against any religion was registered. The authorities of the country adhere to the strict approach towards some Muslim and other religious extremist organizations which destabilize situation in the country. Upon finishing the visit he noted that the authorities of Kazakhstan seriously took into account the concerns of the international community over the proposed draft law on religion, especially, in the field of freedom of religion, considered to revise it in the line of the recommendations of the ODIHR.

I would like to underline that in the promotion of the mutual understanding between confessions and ethnic groups the legal issues are on the first place, then the use of good practices of integration and political methods. The OSCE Participating States took the obligations to prevent discrimination against any religious group or believer, providing and promoting the freedom of faith, alone or in the group, through transparent and non-discrimination laws, rules, practice or policy. The initial draft of the new law on religions was declined by the Constitution Court of Kazakhstan because it does not meet the Constitution of the country that witnesses the new approaches in consideration of the legislation in the light of bringing it to the international standards.

The OSCE is urgently interested in the establishment of the universal system of rules, procedures and guarantees to protect freedom of faith. It is important that

the legislation of each country, reacting to the specific historical, cultural, religious circumstances, would be brought as well as possible to the international standards in the field of protection of human rights.

The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), located in Warsaw and rendering judicial assistance, elaborates legislation and provides consultative assistance to the OSCE Participating States.

The OSCE pays special attention to the elaboration of national institutional mechanisms and practices, including existing specialized bodies and national strategies, in combating discrimination and strengthening inter-cultural, inter-religious and inter-ethnic partnership and dialogue.

In 2006 Kazakhstan made a very important step towards strengthening interrelation between the government and the civil society. Almaty Tolerance Implementation Meeting in its Resolution stressed the role of the governments and civil society in promoting inter-cultural, inter-religious and inter-ethnic understanding with a view to ensure respect for diversity and freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief.

In order that Kazakhstan during its Chairmanship, could become the system integrator, linking Euro-Atlantic and Euro-Asian dimensions of the architecture for security on the basis of strengthening confidence and mutual understanding between nations and countries the strong coordination of the efforts of international organizations is needed.

Mass Media should play a special role because in many aspects they form the ideas about the values of the society in the minds of millions of people. Thus, the responsibility of the politicians and Mass Media for creation of a tolerant atmosphere among different religious groups in the society is very important.

The other factor, deserving special attention, is education, especially, for the young generation, in the spirit of peace, cultural diversity, tolerance, understanding and respect to "others". Special attention should be paid to religious education in accordance with the Toledo Guiding Principles which the ODIHR education project deals with.

The major international partners of Kazakhstan in promoting tolerance and nondiscrimination are the traditional partners of the OSCE such as the United Nations (UN) and its Alliance of Civilisations, the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), the European Union (EU), particularly, OIC-EU Forum. Also, the Organisation regular assesses the activities of the international and regional organizations for better coordination of the efforts of the international community in this sphere. The national partners of the OSCE are the Muslim communities, civil society, governmental and non-governmental bodies on religions issues, human rights and freedoms as the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan, Spiritual Department of Muslims of Kazakhstan, Ombudsman, Commission on Human Rights and others.

Thus, Kazakhstan together with the other Participating States in the process of implementation of its obligations on promoting tolerance and nondiscrimination should strengthen its activities in the field of legislation, law-enforcement practices, education, civil society and Mass Media, migration and integration, religious freedom, inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue.

In this context the implementation of my mandate of the Personal Representative on Tolerance and Nondiscrimination of Muslims in the region of OSCE is to be conducted in three main directions – legal, social economical and political.

The legal part means that Muslims, throughout the OSCE area, should possess all rights equally with the majority population of the country, should not be considered as second-class citizens, should not be prosecuted and detained by the law-enforcement bodies, should not be alienated and separated because of their religion. Political discourses and Mass Media should follow the main postulate: “The war on terror must not become a war on Muslims”.

Social economical means that the quality of life of Muslims living in the OSCE area must be improved. The government and society should recognize that Muslims have the same basic needs and desires as others, which are job, housing, education for children, material well-being, cultural acceptance and religious

freedom. The solution of these problems, as my predecessors' experience shows, places a good ground for the real integration.

Besides, the major directions of the activities of the Personal Representative have to include participating in the OSCE programmes on tolerance and nondiscrimination, presenting information for the ODIHR reports on hate crimes and ODIHR programmes on improvement of data collection. Also, this work includes facilitation of effectiveness of legislation and implementation of existing legislative measures in promoting Muslim rights, education for law enforcement bodies in the spirit of religious tolerance, propagation of positive practices and facilitation of the role and responsibility of Mass Media in covering this topic. Capacity building of the Muslim communities and organizations of civil society and joint work with the local authorities is important.

In conclusion, I would like to express hope for the further improvement of political, cultural and educational cooperation of the OSCE and national partners and to wish to all participants successes in achieving our common goal – providing better present and future for our peoples.

Thank you for your attention.