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Schweizer Wortmeldung zur Ansprache des Generalsekretärs der Organisation der Islamischen Konferenz (OIC) im Ständigen Rat der OSZE am 6. Mai 2010

Mr. Chairman,

The Swiss delegation welcomes the Secretary General of the Organization of the Islamic conference, H.E. Professor Ihsanoglu and thanks him for his address. As Professor Ihsanoglu knows from recent meetings with the Swiss Minister of Foreign Affairs, my country attaches great importance to strengthening the relations between Switzerland and the OIC as the political organ of the Islamic world.

The reason for my asking for the floor is to respond briefly to Mr. Ihsanoglu's comments regarding the decision against the construction of new minarets in Switzerland.

First of all, I would like to emphasize that the ban on the construction of new minarets is not a restriction on the right to practice one's faith. The Swiss constitution guarantees the right to religious freedom, and Muslims in Switzerland will continue to have the freedom to profess their faith in Islam and to practise their religion.

Mosques and Muslim places of worship, of which there are currently at least 150 in Switzerland, will remain unaffected. The construction and use of the latter have not been prohibited.

An independent analysis of the underlying reasons for the choice of vote of the population, done by Swiss universities, shows clearly that the referendum result is not a rejection of Switzerland's Muslim community, its religion or culture. It appears that the Swiss voters have reacted to a negative, yet abstract perception forged by the international media coverage of a political and violent Islam, which wants to spread sharia law and oppresses women.

An open and constructive dialogue between religious and social groupings and

the authorities can help address these fears, lend visibility to the Muslim communities of Switzerland, and promote mutual understanding.

Consequently, for the Swiss Government, it is a priority to strengthen this dialogue. The Muslim communities in Switzerland have reacted positively to the invitation to engage in dialogue, and two very constructive meetings have already been held, mainly focusing on the question of how to improve integration measures and mutual understanding within the society.

The Swiss government can understand the disappointment and incomprehension felt by many people in the Muslim world.

Nonetheless, a hardening of positions will not solve any problems. The Swiss government is a staunch advocate of cooperation rather than confrontation, and has strengthened its commitment to promote continued dialogue both within Switzerland as well as at intergovernmental and multilateral levels. We invite the OIC and its member countries to become our partners on the international level in this endeavor, especially in the framework of the Alliance of Civilizations.

In our experience, the best way to promote mutual understanding is for Muslim and non-Muslim organizations to work together, for instance in the humanitarian and development field. As a matter of fact, dialogue through practice should be promoted. The thematic platforms of the Group of Friends of the Alliance of Civilisations, on the topic of bridging the gap in the humanitarian field, or on media literacy, are most relevant for the issues we are facing. Switzerland is committed to engage in such platforms, and invites other countries, Muslim and non-Muslim, to join in this dialogue through practice effort.

Switzerland wants to remain an open-minded and tolerant country, a reliable international partner, a country that values solidarity and is committed to making its contribution to the world community. Muslims continue to be welcome in Switzerland. This is something the Swiss government can guarantee.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman