

HIGH-LEVEL OSCE CONFERENCE ON “TOLERANCE AND NON-DISCRIMINATION”

(Astana, 29-30 June 2010)

Session on combating intolerance and discrimination against Muslims

*(Remarks by Ömür Orhun, Ambassador, Adviser and Special Envoy of the
Secretary General of the OIC)*

I want to start with the relationship of the Muslim world with the West. In that context, I will also try to amplify OIC’s endeavors in this respect.

I will then dwell on Islamophobia and how to fight with intolerance and discrimination against Muslims.

MUSLIM WORLD – THE WEST:

As we all know, the history of the relations of the Muslim world with the Christian world, or if you like the West, is a story of complicated, intricate and controversial set of relationships.

This history has also helped to shape diverse cultural attachments.

There are historical and deep-rooted perceptions and prejudices on both sides of the Muslim-West divide. These cannot possibly be characterized as friendly or harmonious.

On the other hand, there have also been times that were, or that appeared to be, constructive in terms of relationships across cultural boundaries.

However, persistent failure of understanding or even trying to understand each other marks negatively even those relatively stable periods.

Attitudes laid down rigidly for many centuries in understanding other cultures, religions and value systems seem to continue to shape the moral environment even today.

Therefore, the task before us is not easy. Paying only lip service to harmony and constructive relationships will not suffice.

Our challenge is to generate practical and applicable measures to address present misunderstandings, misapprehensions and sources of conflict, whether they are real or perceived.

In this respect, the OIC is seriously endeavoring for reconciliation between the Muslim World and the West, and between Islam and Christianity.

When achieved, such reconciliation will no doubt be of historical significance. For this, all of us must consistently speak out against acts and manifestations of hate, particularly in public discourse.

We must also work in favor of tolerance, mutual respect and understanding. Furthermore, everybody must reject identification of terrorism and violent extremism with any religion, culture, ethnicity, nationality or race.

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ISLAMOPHOBIA AND INTOLERANCE AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST MUSLIMS

Islamophobia is a serious form of intolerance and discrimination motivated by fear, mistrust and hatred of Islam and its adherents. It is often manifested in combination with racism, xenophobia, anti-immigrant sentiments and religious intolerance.

Manifestations of Islamophobia include hate speech, violent acts and discriminatory practices, which can be manifested by both non-state actors and state officials, as well as by the mass media.

As we sadly observe, Islamophobic rhetoric associate Muslims with terrorism and portray them as international and domestic threat. It makes stereotypical allegations about Muslims as a monolithic group of people whose culture is backward and incompatible with human rights and democracy.

Other examples of Islamophobic rhetoric in political discourse, the media, schools, work places and in the religious sphere involve, but are not limited to the following:

- **Calling for banning and/or restricting visibility and practices of Islam in public space on the grounds that Islam is not a religion but an oppressive ideology;**
- **Accusing Muslims of not willing to integrate in the societies where they live, and also accusing them of trying to impose their own values and culture;**
- **Describing Muslims as a demographic time-bomb, which will become a numerical majority where they are minority for the time-being;**
- **Charging Muslims with not being loyal to the country where they live, but to the Muslim community as a whole;**
- **Advocating collective expulsion of Muslims or removal of their citizenship rights, based on the accusation that they are enemies within;**
- **Dehumanizing and demonizing Muslims as a collective “other” defined only on religious basis, leading to the radicalisation of the “Muslim category”;**
- **Accusing all Muslims of being responsible for wrong doings committed by other Muslim individuals or groups;**
- **Denying contributions that Muslims made and are making to the society and to the World;**
- **Rejecting any possibility of co-operation between Muslims and non-Muslims.**

On the other hand, acts of Islamophobia, which can be committed by non-state actors or state officials, can be summed up as follows:

- **Physical attacks carried out by individuals or organized groups, on individuals, community institutions and property that are rightly or wrongly associated with Muslims or Islam;**

- **Discriminatory immigration and naturalization procedures directly or indirectly excluding Muslims or placing them in a disadvantageous situation in comparison with people of other religious or ethnic origins;**
- **Racial/religious profiling measures, including stop and search, surveillance of religious and cultural Muslim organizations, and no flight lists, which have disproportional impact on Muslims;**
- **Restrictions, by either legislative or administrative means, on the visibility of religious symbols targeting exclusively Muslims, as in the case of prohibition of minarets.**

Institutionalised anti-Muslim racism, on the other hand, is state and local government policies and systematic practices discriminating Muslims based on their religious identity. It poses a serious threat to the security of Muslims, because such policies and practices can lead to spreading bias, and therefore can be fertile grounds for hate crimes.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO COMBAT ISLAMOPHOBIA

In order to combat Islamophobia and discrimination against Muslims, and to foster tolerance and mutual understanding based on international human rights standards, the OIC would like to make the following recommendations to States, international organizations and non-state actors:

- **Take all necessary measures within their power and legal/jurisdictional systems to ensure a safe environment free from Islamophobic harassment, violence and discrimination in all walks of life;**
- **Develop and implement comprehensive educational strategies and programmes for combating Islamophobia and intolerance and discrimination against Muslims;**
- **Create, whenever necessary, specialized bodies and initiatives in order to combat Islamophobia;**
- **Include in their integration policies programmes and activities addressing discrimination against Muslims and Islamophobia and its roots causes;**
- **Collect and maintain reliable information and statistics about Islamophobic hate crimes committed within their territory and area of responsibility, and make such reports publicly available;**

- **Combat Islamophobic hate crimes, which can be fuelled by Islamophobic hate speech in the media and on the Internet;**
- **Take all necessary measures in order to prevent racial/religious profiling and other forms of institutionalized racism and Islamophobia;**
- **Conduct public awareness campaigns and specific programmes for governmental officials and also for citizens in order to combat Islamophobia and discrimination against Muslims;**
- **Encourage and support intergovernmental human rights agencies and non-governmental organizations dealing with Islamophobia;**
- **Strive to develop necessary mechanisms and standards to increase international co-operation in combating intolerance against Muslims, as well as Islamophobia.**

A preliminary version of this paper was presented to the Roundtable on “Addressing Islamophobia: Building on Unused Opportunities for Mutual Respect and Inclusion”, held on 27 May 2010 in Rio de Janeiro, within the context of the Third Global Forum of the Alliance of Civilizations (AoC), and was met with general approval.

I hope the OSCE will also adopt a normative approach to deal with this serious human rights violation within its well-known comprehensive human dimension.

omur.orhun@gmail.com