



Government Offices  
Ministry for Foreign Affairs  
Sweden

**Statement by Sweden: session 1 at the OSCE High Level  
Conference on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination in Astana 29-  
30 June, 2010**

Mr Chairman, Distinguished representatives of the Kazakh  
government, Dear colleagues,

In December 2008, Sweden's Minister for Trade, Dr Ewa Bjorling,  
awarded diplomas to one hundred Muslim Peace Agents, aged  
between 17 and 25. These young Swedes from all parts of our country  
had successfully completed the course "Muslim Peace Culture".

This is a model – adapted to contemporary Swedish society - of  
presenting Islam as a message of peace, thus offering a healthy  
counter-image to the many pictures of the militant *jihadi* that meet us  
in the media. The Swedish government has continued to encourage  
this approach. Thus, in April last year, three Peace Agents  
accompanied FM Carl Bildt to the UN AoC Forum in Istanbul, and in  
December last year, they presented their methodology in Brussels,  
under the auspices of the SE EU Presidency.

The course covers a wide range of topics, including the parallel  
phenomena of islamophobia and Westphobia. The latter term was  
used to refer to prejudice and preconceived negative notions visavi  
Europe, including the Swedish majority society, its values, institutions  
and traditions.

Today, we can register several examples of young Muslims infusing  
new life into the Scandinavian model for civil society action. Thus, a  
new NGO, the SMPJ, was founded in 2007. Together with the  
Christian Peace Movement, they have identified the following  
concerns and challenges:

- a) wide-spread prejudice against religion as a source of conflict and against religious people as prone to extremism and intolerance;
- b) plights and rights of Muslim minorities – this was the topic of a recent seminar organized jointly by the Association of Islamic Universities (*Rabitat al-Jami'at al-Islamiyyah*) and the Swedish Institute in Alexandria, a diplomatic mission dedicated to Euro-Arab dialogue
- c) Plights and rights of Christian minorities, issues that will be dealt with later during this conference;

As a joint effort to overcome interfaith and intercultural stereotypes, let me also mention the gratifying experience of working together in Stockholm with the Embassies of Spain and Turkey (the co-founders of the UN AoC), joined by Greece, Egypt, Kuwait, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. In 2009 the focus was on minorities, and this year it is on gender issues.

In his report to the OSCE on Muslims in Sweden, October 2008, ambassador Omur Orhun wrote:

“The Swedish government is to be commended for its willingness to respond in an effective manner to acts of discrimination and intolerance against Muslims. These various good practices should be disseminated through the ODIHR.”

Mr Chairman, Distinguished colleagues,

Sweden comes to this plenary session in the firm conviction that islamophobia is a dangerous disease which must and can be cured. We believe that the collective wisdom, political courage, and institutional strength of the OSCE will help us do just that.

I thank you for your attention.