

Address by Ambassador Adil Akhmetov

**Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on
Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims**

The Permanent Council
Vienna, 15 November 2012

Mr. Chairman,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since my appointment to my mandate by the OSCE Greek Chairperson-in-Office in June 2009 I have spoken on intolerance and discrimination against Muslims at various high level fora, including the third and fourth Congresses of the leaders of world and traditional religions in Astana, inter-religious and inter-cultural conferences held in Krakow, Geneva, Warsaw, Prague and Vienna. With the same purpose I have accomplished visits to 13 major OSCE member states and the European Union Institutions. Within this year we - the 3 personal Representatives of the OSCE Chairperson-in-office have paid joint visits to Austria, Norway, Azerbaijan and Armenia. I have also participated in the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw and in the Autumn Meeting of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in Tirana and in the International conference "Astana declaration towards a Security Society" organized by the OSCE Centre in Astana in conjunction with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan and the Institute of Strategic Studies in Almaty with the participation of ambassadors and representatives international organizations, and scholars.

The main focus of my specific mandate has always been to raise awareness of the governments of the OSCE participating states on intolerance and discrimination against Muslims as this phenomenon is a serious threat to democracy and human rights across the OSCE region.

Though anti-Muslim prejudices and stereotypes are centuries old, recently they have acquired a new form: such as humiliating the sacred feelings of Muslims and their Prophet through mass media. Given that there are a number of indicators concerning the motives behind these incidents suggesting that the perpetrators are influenced by the widespread prejudices and stereotypes about Muslims. I strongly encourage international organizations and the OSCE member-states to respond the manifestation of intolerance and discrimination through the media, including the Internet within the lines of UN Resolution 16/18 and underline the importance of OSCE Commitments concerning the role of political representatives and the media in promoting mutual respect and understanding while respecting freedom of religion.

At this point I would also like to underline that ODIHR has conducted a series of awareness activities to promote the Guidelines for Educators on Countering Intolerance against Muslims. They include 1) Hearing at PACE Session on the Role of Education to Counter Intolerance against Muslims (26 June 2012); 2) Roundtable Meeting on Countering Intolerance against Muslims through Education for Societies in Transition (6 September 2012, Vienna); and 3) Expert Meeting on Globalization, Diversity and Social Cohesion in Educational Settings (5 November, UNESCO Headquarters in Paris).

Both the Ministerial Council and the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE can further help ODIHR to promote the Guidelines by adopting decisions directly encouraging participating States to make use of this new tool in educational settings.

I am more than sure that this would be the most effective response to the manifestations of intolerance against Muslims through the media, as it would pose no threat to freedom of expression. If the participating States are sincerely concerned about freedom of expression, they should take make leadership in promoting mutual respect and understanding through education and awareness raising.

Countering intolerance against Muslims, while fighting terrorism:

While it is legitimate for states to take their own internal measures against the threat of terrorism and to ensure the security of their citizens, this should be done within the line of internationally recognized human rights standards, stated in Helsinki final act and Astana declaration of 2010

including the prohibition of discrimination based on religion. However, it appears that participating States do not always respect this universal principle.

I am particularly concerned about racial profiling of Muslims and the use of Islamophobic materials in terrorism prevention training programmes. It is disappointing that some participating States still continue to scrutinize social, economic and political activities of all Muslim organizations and individuals in their jurisdictions. There are also reports, indicating that some private anti-terrorism centers which provide training programmes for law enforcement officers spread biased views about Muslims. In this regard, I would like to remind all participating States of their commitment to reject association of terrorism with any religion or culture.

Restrictions on freedom of religion:

Moreover, I would like to underline that the legislative actions on the restriction of wearing headscarf and prohibition of construction of minarets which are in force in some participating states are in violation of freedom of religion or belief, because they directly or indirectly discriminate against Muslims, based on their religion. The recent inter-faith dialogue projects launched in various participating States cannot be a remedy to this situation on their own. Such projects would produce positive results only if the equality of all individuals, whatever their religious background is, protected by governments.

Public discourse:

As the summary report of the OSCE High Level Conference on Countering Intolerance against Muslims (28 October 2011, Vienna) underlines, biased and discriminatory portrayal of Muslims in the media and political speech remain a serious concern for the OSCE. Muslims are often represented as a monolithic group of people, which is incapable of valuing the principles of democracy and human rights, and Islam as a violent ideology, rather than a religion. I am especially worried about the dissemination of conspiracy theories against Muslims and the use of anti-Muslim discourse during election campaigns. While acknowledging the importance of freedom of expression, I witness little leadership from the political sphere and the media to counter the stereotyping of Muslims.

Hate crimes:

Although the efforts of participating States to bring to justice those responsible for such heinous crimes are commendable, there still a lot to do, in order to increase the effectiveness of combating hate crimes against Muslims. Very few participating States collect and maintain statistical data concerning crimes motivated by intolerance against Muslims. Most hate crime incidents are not reported to the police or any other institution, as the victims do not trust public authorities. There are almost no public awareness campaigns about anti-Muslim hate crimes. Partnerships between civil society and law enforcement officers to combat hate crimes against Muslims are also very limited.

At this point I would like to draw your attention to the following: In 2012, ODIHR will have delivered 3 training courses on hate crimes against Muslims. These are for NGOs in Spain, Bulgaria and Germany and other German-speaking countries. As hate crimes against Muslims are under reported and under recorded, the increasing of capacities of civil society is very important. However, ODIHR needs more support from participating States to continue such training activities.

Recommendations are proposed:

To Counter intolerance against Muslims, while fighting terrorism the following:

- Abolish any policies of racial profiling of Muslims, as they reinforce anti-Muslim stereotypes and jeopardize co-operation between law enforcement officers and communities;
- Investigate existing terrorism prevention training programmes, in order to ensure that they are accurate and free from bias, and establish standards for private counter-terrorism training firms and experts, for this purpose;
- Increase cultural competency and understanding of human rights among intelligence and law enforcement personnel.

Restrictions on freedom of religion:

- Annul any laws concerning restrictions on the manifestation of religion, which directly or indirectly discriminate people, based on their religion;
- Ensure that inter-faith dialogue projects and programmes promote freedom of religion or belief and counter discrimination based on religion;
- Take measures, whenever it is appropriate and provide for other religious communities, to create conditions favorable for Muslims to practice their religion, including access to places of worship, cemeteries and teaching about Islam.
- Guarantee that Muslims in detention centres and prisons are protected from discrimination based on religion.

Public discourse:

- Support educational initiatives to counter intolerance and discrimination against Muslims in public discourse;
- Review and revise educational curricula to ensure that the history of Islam is taught in an unbiased manner;
- Integrate human rights standards and practices into educational courses;
- Develop and implement media literacy courses for students in primary and secondary schools, to enhance their ability to analyse and evaluate information in the media;
- Utilize ODIHR's Guidelines for Educators on Countering Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims, Addressing Islamophobia through Education;
- Ensure that public broadcasting services avoid stereotyping of individuals and groups, and report fairly on individuals and groups in conformity with the highest professional and ethical standards including during election periods and public gatherings;
- Promote the swift and effective implementation of United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution 16/18 on Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping and stigmatization of, and discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against, persons based on religion or belief;
- Consider developing codes of conduct for political representatives to encourage them to condemn hate speech and acts of bias-motivated violence, and to refrain from making intolerant statements;
- Implement effective measures, including the adoption of legislation to prohibit speech which incites violence, hatred or discrimination against an individual based upon his or her protected characteristics. In order to uphold freedom of expression, such legislation should clearly and narrowly define unacceptable speech in accordance with international law and standards, while protecting all other forms of expression;

- Encourage constructive public debate on the political and social exclusion of Muslims, by promoting joint partnerships and genuine dialogue on issues regarding integration, freedom of religion or belief, counter-terrorism and discrimination

Hate crimes:

- Create criminal procedures where anti-Muslim hate crimes are investigated, prosecuted and trialed appropriately;
- Establish monitoring and data collection mechanisms where such hate crimes are registered and recorded;
- Consider establishing parliamentary committees to investigate the root causes of hate crimes against Muslims and the effectiveness of the existing mechanisms to combat such crimes;
- Enhance the capacities of law enforcement officers in order to prevent and respond to Islamophobic hate crimes;
- Put mechanisms in place to ensure intelligence services pass on vital information to the police so that crimes against Muslims and others can be prevented;
- Support civil society programmes to monitor and report about anti-Muslim hate crimes and provide assistance for the victims
- Increase co-operation and trust between law enforcement officers and Muslim communities as a means of preventing and responding to hate crimes against these communities

Security of Muslim Communities:

Building confidence between law enforcement officers and Muslims is the key to increase the security of this community. ODIHR needs more support from participating States to explore possible remedies to this situation.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, combating anti-Muslim prejudice is a task which concerns all of us and requires joint actions.

Concluding my speech I would like to express my deep gratitude to the Irish OSCE Chairmanship Task Force and ODIHR for their advice and valuable help, and wish you fruitful day of interesting discussions and sharing of experience and best practices.

Thank you!

II. Overview of Main Activities

1. On March 26-29, 2012 I participated in the Human Dimension Committee and we the three Personal Representatives of the OSCE Chairperson-in-office on Combating intolerance and discrimination against Jews, Christians and Muslims paid a country visit to Austria.
2. On May 30-31, 2012 I participated in the IV Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions held in Astana (Kazakhstan) by the initiative of President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev and made a report on “Multiculturalism: World experience and realities in Kazakhstan”. His initiative received widespread support of the world community. The fact that Kazakhstan has become a venue for four congresses of the Leaders of World and traditional Religions in succession is a strong evidence that our country, being an example of tolerance and concord, is an essential factor of peace and stability in a vast and important geopolitical region.

3. On June 11-15, 2012 we the three Personal Representatives of the OSCE Chairperson-in-office on Combating intolerance and discrimination against Jews, Christians and Muslims paid a country visit to Norway.
4. On October 3, 2012 I attended the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw and made a presentation in a Working session 14: Tolerance and non-discrimination: Review of the implementation of commitments on promotion of mutual respect and understanding and in Side Event.
5. On October 5-7, 2012 I participated in the Autumn Meeting of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in Tirana and made a presentation at the session «Promoting and Protecting Multiethnic and Multicultural Societies in the OSCE Region».
6. On October 8-19, 2012 we the three Personal Representatives of the OSCE Chairperson-in-office on Combating intolerance and discrimination against Jews, Christians and Muslims paid country visits to Azerbaijan and Armenia.
7. On October 23, 2012 I participated in the International conference “Astana declaration towards a Security Society” in Almaty and made a presentation in the Plenary session.

My Presentations and reports as the Personal Representatives of the Chairperson-in-Office are placed in the website <http://tandis.odihhr.pl>.