Egyptian Delegation

OSCE Chairmanship Conference on Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims
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Statement to Session 3. Media and Public discourse as instruments to Counter Intolerance and discrimination against Muslims

As prepared for delivery by Ambassador Moustapha A. Morsi

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The influence of the media in orienting public debate is broadly acknowledged as they can contribute to raise awareness, to clarify misunderstandings, and to engage the increasingly diverse societies in a thoughtful debate. Media can contribute positively on public perception of immigrants and how they ensure opportunities for societal developments, economic growth, and cultural diversity.

Despite the fact that the Islamic world, and specifically the Middle-east region, receives more media attention than any other part of the world, most of the westerners remain confused by the various developments in this region. Besieged by a barrage of details, surprisingly a small percentage of western populations have a coherent framework within which to place this information. The Middle-east remains what I often call an area of"detailed ignorance". People harness a lot of details, impressions, and stereotypes, but they rarely have a sense of the whole picture.

Hardly a month passes without provocative acts of different forms against Muslims and their religion around the world. Among the elements of deep concern in the Muslim world today are the intentional offensive representation of the Prophet Mohammad * PBUH * in the form of insulting caricatures and repercussions of repeated publications in some European Countries , despite the knowledge that such depiction of a revered figure of the Islamic faith is quite provoking for Muslims world-wide. It is necessary to stress the provocative political nature of the issue, which is perceived in the Islamic World as another manifestation of discrimination and humiliation. Such acts encourage the extremist groups, like Al-Qaeda, increase their support in society, and bolsters the division of Europe's Muslim communities, thereby hampering attempts at integration.

The furor over such acts brought millions of protestors into the streets in the whole of the Islamic world. Anti-Western feeling took on a new tone, one which had only been seen previously in the era of anti-colonial liberation movements.

Freedom of the press can not justify caricatures portraying the Founder of Islam as a terrorist. When the pretext of freedom of expression incites further hatred and racism against a certain ethnic or religious group, then such freedom has far exceeded its ethical limitations and can not be justified under the name of the freedom of press. Journalistic ethics and moral codes call for special consideration for any particular faith, even by those who do not share the belief in question.

In the same line of action , to mention a few, a far-right Dutch M.P made a statement , that was later repeated by a Belgian leader of the Right wing political party , which labeled the Islamic Holy Koran , and I am here quoting , a "fascist , intolerant and unacceptable book" . Such declarations reflect total ignorance of the teachings of Islam and its values, and incite more hatred and intolerance against those who adhere to this religion. The Core of the Holy Koran calls for many humanitarian principles, for peace, tolerance, respect, and equality for all, regardless of gender, race and ethnicity.

Such attitudes and actions against Muslims based on unjust stereotypes and criticism of Muslims beliefs can be seen as undermining fundamental rights. The common fundamental principles of E.U and its member states under community law, The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the E.U., and the European Convention for protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedom, must be respected.