



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

The Secretary General

Córdoba, Spain, 9 October 2007

**OSCE Chairmanship Conference on Intolerance and
Discrimination Against Muslims**

**Opening Remarks by
OSCE Secretary General, Marc Perrin de Brichambaut**

Mr. Chairman,
Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to thank the Spanish Chairmanship of the OSCE, the Regional Authorities of Andalucía and the city of Córdoba for hosting this event, for bringing attention and focus to the important issue of intolerance and discrimination against Muslims, and the many participants whose work and efforts have made this Conference possible.

The struggle against intolerance and discrimination lies at the centre of the OSCE's work. As an organization that deals with security in all of its facets, we believe that our states and their citizens can only be secure within societies built on foundations that ensure respect for each individual citizen and each community. Our modern societies are complex, multi-cultural, globalised structures and are often built upon fragile architectures. A challenge we share across the OSCE area, from Vancouver to Vladivostok, is that of integrating diversity into healthy societies and legitimate polities.

Muslims and their communities - whether newly immigrated or established for generations, or even centuries, whether a minority or a majority religion – play a

vital role in the societies of most OSCE participating States. Their experiences are not monolithic, but rather as diverse and complex as the societies in which they live. The rich historical experience of the city of Córdoba and of the region of Andalucía is a source of lessons for all of us in this regard.

Discriminatory practices, marginalization, exclusion and non-integration pose very real threats to the fibres of our delicately inter-woven societies. They can lead to anger, resentment and frustration, in extreme cases even to hate and violence, shattering societies along ethnic and religious lines. They can also undermine our own traditions of tolerance, the richness and diversity of our societies, and the economic potential that diversity holds out for the young in their future endeavors.

Integrating the diversity and cultural richness Muslim communities bring to our societies, in a way that strengthens our common values, is one of the most important challenges of our times. The stakes are high; our thinking and our action must be equally so.

The good news is that the OSCE is already active in this area. Combating discrimination and promoting mutual respect and understanding have always been fundamental to our vision of building comprehensive security within and among our fifty-six participating States.

Our starting point is the 1975 Helsinki Final Act and its emphasis on promoting the ‘inherent dignity of the individual.’ It is worth returning to the Final Act itself, which commits participating States to ‘recognize and respect the freedom of the individual to profess and practice, alone or in community with others, religion or belief acting in accordance with the dictates of his own conscience.’

On this foundation , the OSCE has built a strategy to foster greater respect for human rights and the fundamental freedoms, in the interest of increasing stability within states and between them.

The OSCE angle is wide. The Organization’s institutions, its field operations, and its three Personal Representatives – one of whom is Ambassador Omur Orhun,

whose mandate is focused specifically on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims – act jointly to support participating States in overcoming intolerance and fostering mutual respect and understanding as an integral part of the implementation of OSCE values common to all.

Ministers,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The OSCE sees combating intolerance and discrimination against Muslims, through the promotion of mutual respect and understanding, inter-cultural and religious dialogue, as an integral part of our conflict prevention and crisis management activities. These tasks reside, indeed, at the heart of the vision that has driven our collective efforts for the last three decades.

I look forward to our discussions.