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**OSCE Conference
On Anti-Semitism and On Other Forms of Intolerance
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Session 2: Education on the Holocaust and on anti-Semitism

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Your Majesty,
Honourable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I should like to begin by thanking the OSCE Organisation and the Spanish Foreign Minister for allowing me to speak at this round table in my capacity as President of the European Jewish Congress.

Cordoba - the "Mother of Philosophers". This was Cordoba, the Muslim Caliphate, where the Jewish, Christian and Muslim communities lived side by side peaceably from the 9th to 12th centuries. The diversity of each community was integrated into the common life of the city. Differences were tolerated in the spirit of openness held by Andalusian Islam. Far from being an Irenist flight or idealisation on our part, it is rather an intense memory of the experience of those who for a few centuries knew how to live under the rule of moderation and tolerance for the specificity of each community.

This is surely the reason why Cordoba was chosen to host this OSCE conference on Tolerance, and I thank the organisers for bringing us back to the actual setting where it was once, and hopefully still, possible to live together in our differences.

The theme of this working session is "Education on the Holocaust and on anti-Semitism". In the very title several notions are interwoven, as if aligned along a Cartesian axis: on the one hand we have education, on the other there is the Holocaust and anti-Semitism - moving back and forth between education and memory.

The transformation of our local realities towards a global society makes it particularly timely to discuss the role of education systems in the context of rising intolerance. Thus it is even more painful and anachronistic, as we commemorate the liberation of Auschwitz, that we must speak of anti-Semitic attacks. It is also particularly heart-rending to see that the classroom has now also become a theatre for intolerance.

We observe with surprise and pain that universities are losing their "intercultural agora" dimension to turn into "campuses of ignorance", of fighting and violence.

In French universities such as Lyon III and Paris VII, lecturers make revisionist statements. In hallowed Italian universities such as Pisa, Florence and Turin events with Israeli authorities could not be organised due to the antagonism of groups of agitators. In England they are talking about boycotting academic and scientific relations with Israeli universities, as if this would foster the process of peace in the region. Moreover, not even the prestigious Columbia University has been able to escape anti-Semitic polemics.

Boycotts and intimidation, prejudice and sectarianism in environments where one should learn that academic and scientific research also - and especially - calls for respect of others, respect for freedom of speech, both spoken and heard. Dangerous, perilous signs of intolerance, of an anti-Semitism that is perpetuated changing the way it is expressed, feeding on revisionism, prejudice, hate and moral delegitimisation of the State of Israel, denying European Jews the right to express their own diversity like any other European citizen.

We cannot, we wish not and we must not accept any of these acts, in any sector of our society. We will be neglecting our role and our duty as citizens if we fail to sound the alarm to the whole society, because it is together that we wish to find an answer to these acts, and together make dialogue and tolerance prevail. This is a common duty, the moral responsibility of us all, working for better conditions not only for Jewish citizens but for all members of society.

Can any society calling itself democratic accept that its academic institutions affirm exclusion as a basis for ideas, thinking that one section of society is wrong simply because they are Jewish, and another section right simply because they are not?

It is education's role to assume and promote the specific nature of cultural mediation: mediation understood not as levelling out each person's specific contribution, but as the ability to seek what is new in the other and to bring diversity into our mutual dialogues.

In our opinion, all this enhances even more the meaning and value of "democracy" because "cultural diversity" becomes a beneficial resource for the increasingly complex process of exchange, of growth in people and societies, a true bolstering of European democracy.

If education is a system that promotes peaceful coexistence, how can it accept to harbour intolerance and new social conflicts instead of searching the ways and means to clear the air?

None of our societies has anything to gain from negationist or revisionist theories of the Shoah. Nor can they gain from acts of anti-Semitism, or from the delegitimisation of the State of Israel.

It is certainly unnatural to forget, 60 years after the extermination camps were liberated, that Europe was freed from the horror of the Shoah, that it was freed from Nazism and Fascism. Neither is it time to forget, nor give way before any act of anti-Semitism, nor even to explain how Europe managed to move from the simple utopia of a Europe without war, to the as yet imperfect reality of a common institution like the European Union, together creating intergovernmental platforms such as the OSCE and the Council of Europe.

Now more than ever, with the loss of a number of direct witness of these horrors, education has a role to fulfil in teaching the values of tolerance and pointing out the risks of fanaticism. This is because a monocultural world, such as the one sought by the Nazi and Fascist dictators, would surely be worse - uglier, less stable and more dangerous. Remembering to be vigilant is not a favour or an indulgent kindness to Jewish citizens, it is a conscious choice for the growth of democracy throughout Europe.

We call for education to open itself even more to encounters between cultures, because education against anti-Semitism, racism and xenophobia starts in nursery school. And early childhood is the time to begin learning the values of tolerance, solidarity, respect for others and esteem for each human, in a climate of dialogue and openness.

We should like to suggest a few lines of action that we would like to see concretised in schools and in Europe's educational systems.

Our organisation has initiated a process of collaboration with the European Union and the Member States to set up educational programmes that aim for an improved and deeper knowledge of the history, traditions and culture of the Jewish people in Europe in order to attenuate prejudices and preconceptions. Examples include courses on the Shoah, so as to learn about the ideological and criminal mechanisms that enabled the persecution to occur.

To reinforce the OSCE Permanent Council Decision 607 concerning the fight against anti-Semitism, taken during the last Conference of Berlin in April 2004, we should like to propose to the OSCE and its Member states that they be in a position to develop such projects, to promote initiatives in the field of education that could be shared by the Organisation's member states in fields such as education in European citizenship. In this regard we declare that we are fully available to collaborate in elaborating and participating in such programmes.

Along the same lines we suggest that school programmes of European states devote more time to the history of Israel, to the origin and birth of the modern State as an integral part of European history. We also ask for greater promotion of academic and training exchanges with teaching experiences in Israel in order to improve and deepen knowledge on current history, a gesture we deem important to combat anti-Semitism. We also ask for a formal commitment from the governments and institutions of Europe, thus from the OSCE, to fight

against anti-Semitic teachings and education in the schoolbooks of some countries of the Mediterranean basin and the Middle East.

In conclusion, I should like to return the experience of Caliphate of Cordova, the birthplace of Maimonides, a philosopher so dear to the Jewish tradition. Often unjustly forgotten in European education, European culture owes much of its present knowledge in medicine and philosophy to this man. Maimonides's adolescence coincided with the final days of the Caliphate of Cordova as a city of tolerance, and he left Cordova to finish his days in Egypt. The climate of tolerance he experienced in youth formed the basis for his most important philosophical work, "Moreh Nevuchim" ("Guide to the Perplexed"). This work, on which Maimonides worked for years, in the search not only for philosophical paradigms, but possibly for his own self as well, in order to define rules for co-existence, which he called the "right measure".

Maimonides sought to propose a theory of moderation and harmony that distanced human existence from the dangerous risk of extremist oppositions.

In a contemporary world in which extremisms seem to prevail over reason, the teachings of Maimonides appear in all their lucidity and with a surprising timeliness, not only for ourselves but also for generations to come.

The priority of us all is to bear witness like Maimonides that each man's life is guided by the search to live his own diversity and that of others in justice and equanimity and to avoid the pitfalls of extremism and fanaticism.