

DELEGATION OF TURKEY

ENGLISH only

**STATEMENT BY PROF. DR. MEHMET AYDIN, MINISTER OF STATE
AT THE FIRST SESSION
OF THE OSCE CHAIRMANSHIP CONFERENCE ON INTOLERANCE AND
DISCRIMINATION AGAINST MUSLIMS
(9-10 October 2007, Cordoba)**

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before I present my views on the topic of intolerance and discrimination against Muslims, I would like to point out our alignment with the joint statement made by the European Union.

I should like to thank, first of all, our Spanish hosts especially the OSCE Chairman-in-Office my colleague Mr. Moratinos for bringing us together once again in the splendid city of Cordoba for addressing intolerance and discrimination against Muslims. I also would like to thank the key-note speakers, in particular High Representative President Jorge Sampaio for his address this morning introducing his vision for the implementation of the objectives of the Alliance of Civilizations. My country, which has been referred to many times this morning, will continue to give its full support to him and will contribute to the activities he will carry out on behalf of the Alliance. I have no doubt that the OSCE, under the Spanish Chairmanship this year at the Madrid Ministerial will also renew its commitment to support the implementation phase of the recommendations of the High Level Group of the Alliance which I had the privilege to co-chair.

I would like to congratulate also the OSCE Spanish Chairmanship for the decision to raise the level of political awareness further and provide the opportunity for wider and deeper discussion on the ways and means of tackling intolerance and discrimination against Muslims in all its dimensions.

Since we met last time here in June 2005, incidents of intolerance and discrimination against Muslims have continued unabated and the trends they represent have become alarming. The climate of widespread suspicion against Muslims is a key factor sadly preparing the ground for all sorts of discrimination and intolerance, ranging from individual acts of stereotyping, harassment and physical violence to institutionalized discrimination, including barriers to adequate housing, schooling, employment, participation in public space, and racial profiling. There are, however, signs of cautious optimism and relative satisfaction at the growing level of awareness and recognition of the seriousness of the phenomenon at both national and international levels. A multitude of research and debate on the subject have been put underway in various fora including international bodies such as the United Nations, Council of Europe and the European Union, thus enhancing our knowledge and understanding with

regard to the complex roots and consequences of intolerance and discrimination against Muslims. The report of the then European Monitoring Center for Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) last year on “*Muslims in the European Union: Discrimination and Islamophobia*” was an important contribution.

It has become evident in time that manifestations of intolerance and discrimination against Muslims, like other forms of intolerance, pose a serious threat to democracy, to commonly shared values and ultimately to the world security and peace. We therefore advocate OSCE’s continued and hopefully deepening engagement in this field in line with its overall efforts to promote non-discrimination, mutual respect and understanding.

In my address to the Cordoba Conference two years ago, I had underlined the importance and the need to change the mind-sets and behavioral patterns of the public through strategies especially in the fields of education and media in order to foster mutual understanding, social cohesion, appreciation and respect for the “other.” I am glad that there will be separate and in-depth discussions on each of these topics during the Conference.

I also note with satisfaction that the OSCE has recognized the powerful role that public and political discourse plays in strengthening or conversely jeopardizing the efforts to enhance societal cohesion and respect for diversity. A cause for particular concern for us is the pervasiveness of racist and xenophobic platforms in the programmes of even some democratic parties and the governmental alliances. Traditionally democratic parties in growing number are now openly resorting to the language of fear and vocabulary of exclusion, scapegoating and targeting immigrants in general, Muslims in particular. It is no coincidence that this trend heightens during electoral campaigns.

Mr. Chairman,

In concluding, I would like to underline the specificity and singularity of each form of intolerance in terms of their cultural and historical uniqueness. However, to be effective in countering and eradicating all forms of intolerance, we need to recognize the universality of their underlying causes and the efforts to combat them. Let us seize the opportunity to understand the underlying causes of discrimination and intolerance and let us commit ourselves to act upon the recommendations of this timely conference.

Thank you.