



## **Confronting Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims in Public Discourse**

**Vienna, 27-28 October 2011**

The Hofburg Congress Centre, Neuersaal

Manifestations of intolerance and discrimination in public discourse about Muslims (sometimes referred to as Islamophobic speech) merit serious concern, not least because they increase tensions in society. They also have the potential to legitimize discriminatory practices and fuel acts of violence against individuals, and to create insecurity, exclusion and alienation among Muslim communities. The purpose of this meeting is to explore the role that media and political representatives can play in promoting non-discrimination, mutual understanding and respect for diversity; it also aims to raise awareness of the extent of anti-Muslim expressions in public discourse and its impact on both individual security and social cohesion. Finally, the meeting will identify practical measures and good practice for participating States.

The OSCE acknowledges the specificities of different forms of intolerance and discrimination, while at the same time recognizing the importance of taking a comprehensive approach and addressing cross-cutting issues. In this context, Muslims and Muslim communities can be the subject of multiple forms of discrimination. Criticisms of religious practices are legitimate speech. However, such criticisms frequently tend to portray Muslims as a monolithic group, which is alien and threatening. Recognizing the danger of stigmatizing speech of this sort, the need to combat intolerance and discrimination against Muslims was first mentioned in an official OSCE document in 2002.<sup>1</sup> This Ministerial Council Decision has been reiterated in a number of commitments, condemning acts of discrimination and violence against Muslims,<sup>2</sup> rejecting association of

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<sup>1</sup> OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No. 06 on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination, 7 December 2002 (MC.(10) DEC./6).

<sup>2</sup> OSCE Permanent Council Decision No. 621 on Tolerance and Fight against racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination, 29 July 2004, (PC.DEC/621).

terrorism with any particular religion or culture,<sup>3</sup> and calling for increased awareness-raising measures to prevent intolerance and discrimination, including against Muslims.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, in the 2007 Cordoba Declaration on Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims, the Chairperson-in-Office underlined that this specific form of intolerance and discrimination should be regarded with utmost concern and suggested a range of mechanism and tools to support the efforts of participating States and civil society to counter it.<sup>5</sup>

Despite these efforts, anti-Muslim expressions in political discourse and the media continues to be a matter of concern. This meeting will provide a forum for representatives of OSCE participating States, the media, political and civil society actors to debate the most pressing issues concerning intolerant and discriminatory public discourse against Muslims. How can manifestations of such discourse be identified and how is it possible to draw the distinction between acceptable and unacceptable speech? How can States prevent and respond to anti-Muslim statements without infringing on the right to free expression and freedom of the media? What is the impact of anti-Muslim discourse on Muslim communities and the rest of the society? What good practices have been developed to confront and combat anti-Muslim expressions without infringing freedom of expression?

The meeting will commence with an opening session followed by three working sessions. Discussions should be interactive, allowing for an exchange between the panelists and the participants.

- The first session will address anti-Muslim prejudices and stereotypes that are prevalent in public discourse across the OSCE region.
- The second session will explore the impact of anti-Muslim discourse on both Muslim communities and the rest of the society.
- The third session will focus on the effective ways to combat intolerance and discrimination against Muslims in public discourse, aiming to showcase some practical examples.

The meeting will result in recommendations based on the good practices highlighted. Hence, participants will be asked to focus on concrete measures that may assist participating States.

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<sup>3</sup> OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No. 06 on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination, 7 December 2002 (MC.(10) DEC./6).

<sup>4</sup> OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No. 13/06 on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination, 5 December 2006 (MC.(13) DEC./6).

<sup>5</sup> OSCE Chairperson-in-Office Declaration on the Cordoba Conference concerning Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims, 10 October 2007 (CIO.GAL/155/07/Rev.1)

A new set of Guidelines for Educators to combat anti-Muslim prejudice, developed jointly by ODIHR, UNESCO and Council of Europe, will be also introduced during the opening session.

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## PROGRAMME

### Thursday, 27 October 2011

18:00            Opening Reception  
                  Austrian Ministry for European and International Affairs  
                  Minoritenplatz 8, 1010 Vienna

### Friday, 28 October 2011

09:30            Registration

10:00            Opening Session

10:45            Coffee Break

11:15            Session I: Manifestations of Anti-Muslim Prejudice and Stereotypes in Public Discourse  
*Recurring anti-Muslim prejudice and stereotypes in the media and political discourse will be discussed. There will be a general overview of the continuing and new trends in the manifestations of intolerance and discrimination against Muslims in public discourse.*

12:45            Lunch

14:15            Session II: The Impact of Anti-Muslim Discourse  
*The consequences of anti-Muslim discourse on the society, including Muslim communities, will be elaborated in the light of recent incidents. Special attention will be paid to the context where the acts of discrimination and hate crimes against Muslims may take place.*

15:45            Coffee Break

16:15            Session III: Effective Responses and Good Practices:  
*Initiatives at international, regional and national levels to counter intolerance and discrimination against Muslims in public discourse will be illustrated. Participants will discuss how OSCE/ODIHR and other international actors can further support such initiatives.*

17:45	Closing Session
	Key recommendations from sessions
18:30	End