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CONFERENCE ON TOLERANCE AND NON-DISCRIMINATION
(INCLUDING HUMAN RIGHTS YOUTH EDUCATION ON
TOLERANCE AND NON-DISCRIMINATION)**

Tirana, 21 and 22 May 2013

**Plenary session 1: Combating intolerance and discrimination against any
person, including racism, xenophobia and aggressive nationalism, in
accordance with the existing OSCE commitments**

Mr. Chairperson,
Distinguished colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

In spite of the major efforts made by States and societies within the OSCE region, aggressive nationalism, intolerance and discrimination are worsening. Migration, both of people and of ideas, means that society is becoming ever more complex in cultural, ethnic and religious terms. However, in these hard times of socio-economic downturn, certain political authorities experience the temptation to saddle minorities, foreigners, migrants and refugees with the negative consequences of the crisis. Growing racism, xenophobia, and intolerance towards other faiths and cultures have become serious threats that undermine security and hinder the free development of our countries and peoples.

Three years ago we discussed these same issues in Astana, Kazakhstan. What, then, has changed since then in the countries of Central Asia?

First and foremost, the States of the region have maintained and support inter-ethnic peace in their countries. The greatest success story in this regard is Kazakhstan. State policy in inter-ethnic relations, as well as the experience of the Assembly of Peoples of Kazakhstan and its role in ensuring the rights of all ethnic groups help to create an atmosphere of social tolerance. Nonetheless, problems exist even there: flare-ups of extremism and human rights violations.

The authorities in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan maintain that there is no ethnically motivated racism or discrimination in their countries. Civil society organizations, however, point to cases of racism and direct or indirect discrimination against different types of minorities. On the whole, no visible progress has been made, and in certain areas there are even signs that the situation is worsening.

Kyrgyzstan is the arena of the most inter-ethnic conflicts. In 2010, the conflict between the Uzbek and Kyrgyz communities in the Osh and Jalal-Abad provinces led to hundreds of deaths, the flight of refugees, and massive material damage. The conflict has not been fully settled, and since last year, ethnic tensions in southern Kyrgyzstan have once again been increasing.

The countries of Central Asia, like all of the countries of the former Soviet Union, have seen nationalism and intolerance grow during the process of State and nation building, as well as the formation of market economies with extreme social inequality and injustice. Another important consideration is the preservation of the ethnic view of society left over from the Soviet period. As a consequence, economic, social and political conflicts become bound up with ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural disputes. Our region is affected by both specific and general trends. Primarily, this includes young people and social groups left impoverished by processes of change. These groups cannot see any prospect of improving their situation. Extreme nationalist ideologies become widespread given such a climate of dissatisfaction. In these conditions, one of the most important tools for inter-ethnic and intercultural interaction is campaigning and education.

Unfortunately, in this area we observe a certain regression as a result of inadequacies in education throughout the region. The process of moving away from multilingualism is continuing: young people can speak fewer languages than their parents. The number of individuals who speak a second or third language is falling: bilingualism is waning. Russian is losing its status as a *lingua franca* and neither English nor Chinese can yet fill the gap it has left. The reduction in the number of communication tools is taking place against a backdrop of decreasing knowledge about neighbouring countries in the region. Re-examinations of history and efforts to rewrite it during the process of nation building have led to the creation of opposing national historical narratives where neighbouring peoples are portrayed as enemies. States and the academic community are taking action – a co-ordinating council of Central Asian historians is active in this respect – and conferences and conventions are being held. However, to achieve genuine results, longer-term and more consistent approaches will be required. States must devote greater attention to campaigning against the dissemination of ideas based on racial supremacy or hatred and to promoting values such as equality, non-discrimination, diversity and democracy. This can be done both within and outside the school curriculum. We should also remember the proven effectiveness of public events: festivals, sporting contests, trade fairs and public holidays. Campaigning and education are of particular importance now, given that with the development of new technologies, extremist Nazi groups have begun to make use of the Internet, social networks and flash mobs in order to spread their ideas among young people.

Having the opportunity to study in one's mother tongue plays a major role in maintaining an atmosphere of tolerance. Unfortunately, the number of schools teaching in minority languages is falling rapidly in all Central Asian countries – and this decrease is accelerating in regions affected by inter-ethnic conflict. Opportunities to receive further education in minority languages are also diminishing. Since the unrest in Osh, the People's Friendship University has not reopened.

Increasing racial discrimination against migrants is a major problem. Abuses range from arrests and detentions by law enforcement agencies, workplace discrimination, and the segregation of migrants' children in educational establishments, to xenophobic statements in the media and hate crimes. Such phenomena are not only taking place in Russia, which is the

main destination country for migrants from Central Asia, but also in our region. The difficulty here continues to be that not all victims of racist crimes, including migrants, report them. This distorts statistical data and hinders the fight against crimes motivated by racism, xenophobia and intolerance.

What, then, is the response of States and of civil society to these challenges?

Firstly, all Governments present periodic reports to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on their implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have ombudsmen. In Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, there are National Human Rights Centres. In recent years in Kyrgyzstan, various legislative and political initiatives have been taken to fight racial discrimination, including articles in the new Constitution, a new Criminal Code, amendments to employment law and the Plan of Action on Ethnic Policy and Social Consolidation in Kyrgyzstan to 2015.

Local authorities are key to countering aggressive nationalism and discrimination. Mahallas in Uzbekistan, Jamoats acting with the support of local community development centres in Tajikistan, and councils of elders in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan are making effective use of traditional methods in order to maintain peaceful relations between various ethnic and cultural groups. The position adopted by parents, families, and of traditional social institutions is also of the utmost importance in developing a culture of tolerance and respect. This is particularly important given that all Central Asian countries lack effective legislation on crimes motivated by racial hatred; there are also no mechanisms for implementing existing standards regarding damages and compensation for victims. The problem of protecting the rights of labour migrants and their families, and of protecting them from racial discrimination, is also unresolved. In conclusion, I should like to call for the following: worldwide support for intercultural and interfaith dialogue, both within the region and with other countries, and particularly those linked by migration flows; bringing civil society institutions on board in countering intolerance, xenophobia and discrimination; and wide-ranging co-operation with the OSCE, United Nations institutions, and other international organizations.