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**STATEMENT BY
THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN
AT THE OSCE CONFERENCE ON
RACISM, XENOPHOBIA AND DISCRIMINATION**

Vienna, 4-5 September 2003

The Government's role in ensuring inter-ethnic peace and harmony

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Conference Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan is paying particular attention to the establishment of inter-ethnic harmony and the protection and safeguarding of the rights and legitimate interests of the different nationalities and national minorities living in the Republic.

Of the 25 million citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan, one fifth of the population is today made up of representatives of more than 100 different nations and nationalities from the most diverse countries and most continents of the world.

On account of its geopolitical position, Uzbekistan served as a kind of dumping ground during the totalitarian regime for representatives of national minorities who suffered violent persecution. They included Koreans, Chechens, Dagestanis, Crimean Tartars, Turks, Germans and other nationalities.

At the present time, all nationalities live in peace and harmony in the Republic. They have the same rights, opportunities and freedoms as the titular nationality, study their mother tongue and practise their culture, traditions, customs and ceremonies.

All citizens are equal before the law in Uzbekistan without distinction as to sex, race, nationality, language, religion, social origin, beliefs and personal or social status. The Republic of Uzbekistan ensures that the languages, customs and traditions of the peoples and nationalities living on its territory are respected and creates the conditions necessary for their development and well-being.

The atmosphere of inter-ethnic peace and harmony that reigns today in Uzbekistan is largely thanks to the establishment of ethnic cultural centres in the early 1990s. In that context, laws on public associations and non-State non-commercial organizations were adopted along with the relevant regulations.

There are 135 ethnic cultural centres currently operating in the Republic, while 12 years ago there were only 12. The aims and purposes of these centres are to preserve and develop the original cultures, languages, traditions and customs. The cultural centres of the various nationalities improve the spiritual life of Uzbekistan, its diversity, the processes of mutual enrichment and the development and strengthening of inter-ethnic harmony. The centres operate in the most diverse spheres of activity; many of their representatives work in State institutions, have been elected members of Parliament or play an active role in public life.

This process is clearly a positive one. As world experience of developing polyethnic States shows, the diversity of nationalities and cultures enriches the country and society, makes society more interesting and capable of self-improvement and achieving not only spiritual but also economic prosperity. It needs to be stressed at this point that the Republican Inter-ethnic Cultural Centre was established in 1992 with a view to co-ordinating the work of ethnic cultural centres and providing them with assistance. The assistance fund "*Bangrikenglik -tolerance*" was recently established under the auspices of this centre and it has already begun its operations. I should like to take this opportunity to appeal to the international organizations and foundations to lend their support and pay attention to the development of the original culture and education of national minorities living in the Republic, the expansion of research work and the full and effective participation of peoples and nationalities in the building of democratic civil society in Uzbekistan.