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## **STATEMENT BY THE ALGERIAN DELEGATION AT THE OSCE CHAIRMANSHIP CONFERENCE ON INTOLERANCE AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST MUSLIMS**

Cordoba, 9 and 10 October 2007

### **Session 2**

Mr. Chairman,

The Algerian delegation wishes warmly to thank Spain for hosting this conference and for the wise choice of Cordoba, a historical and cultural centre which, in the past, offered hospitality to the three major monotheistic religions, which were able to exist side by side in a remarkable spirit of harmony and co-operation.

I should also like, on behalf of my country, to thank and commend the Spanish OSCE Chairmanship for translating into reality the Algerian proposal made in Ljubljana in December 2005, during the Thirteenth Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council, for the organization of a conference of this kind, a conference which undoubtedly represents a first step in the necessary process of considering the intolerance and discrimination which Muslims face.

My delegation, however, deeply regrets that not all the Organization's participating States were ready to agree that this gathering should be given the status of an OSCE conference, on the same footing as the previous conferences held to discuss the combating of all forms of intolerance and discrimination.

The Algerian delegation considers that a high-level OSCE conference on combating Islamophobia — held under the auspices of the OSCE — would be entirely logical and justified. In the first place, it would reflect the holistic and neutral approach that should guide the OSCE's work in this field. Secondly, it would be justified by the increasingly numerous attacks and abuses directed against Islam and Muslims — by far the most frequent attacks against any religion, particularly following the acts of terrorism of 11 September 2001.

The scope of these attacks on Islam and the tendency to belittle their importance are sources of danger. They jeopardize peaceful coexistence between religions and civilizations and, consequently, international peace, while at the same time giving support to the proponents of the disastrous theory of the "clash of civilizations", who themselves encourage the trend towards the vilification of Muslims, very well illustrated by the sad episode of the blasphemous caricatures of the Prophet of Islam.

Such campaigns of provocation reinforce the sense of rejection and stigmatization experienced by the Muslim community and lead to tension and mutual distrust. They provide a favourable terrain for the reinforcement of extremist tendencies on all sides, to the delight of those who want to see the world caught up in a pernicious game of escalating provocations and reactions. In such a situation, there is a serious risk that misunderstanding and mutual rejection will grow and develop into a lasting rift. Urgent action is therefore needed to put an end to the baleful phenomenon of intolerance and discrimination towards Muslims before it is too late.

Increased awareness of the dangers that the phenomenon of discrimination brings with it must be accompanied by the identification of those areas and focal points on which our attention and also our action must be concentrated.

In this connection, particular attention must be paid, first of all, to the mass communication media. In view of their audience and influence, the media undoubtedly bear a particular responsibility in propagating a culture of tolerance and of understanding of differences. This formidable task must be performed wisely and with a sense of responsibility.

In this context, questions must be asked about the real contribution made by the media to intercultural understanding and mutual acceptance, given that, in the area with which we are concerned, significant segments of the press, particularly in the West, have exhibited attitudes and behaviour bordering on a campaign of Islamophobia, causing considerable political and psychological harm.

There is certainly no contradiction or opposition between freedom of expression and respect for values and beliefs. Both can exist harmoniously in a climate free from provocations and animosity. On this subject, the Algerian delegation wishes to reiterate here its proposal that an OSCE seminar should be held in Vienna on media freedom and responsibility.

It should be added that freedom of expression cannot be a reason for inaction by governments and other institutions or by civil society. All parties involved have an obligation, under normal circumstances, to distance themselves from and indeed to censure individuals or institutions that are guilty of provocations or offences related to Islamophobia.

Socio-economic exclusion, the *délit de faciès* (the offence of having a particular appearance) and victimization of all kinds are some of the manifestations of rejection experienced by foreign communities in certain host countries. Such multifaceted intolerance and discrimination, affecting in various degrees the different communities living in the OSCE area, call for a response commensurate with the challenges, based on a holistic approach and on the principle involved, and differentiated, with regard to practical action to combat the various abuses, according to the particular form of intolerance in question. In this connection, it is important that studies should be carried out and statistics maintained to determine the incidence of each form of abuse.

In this context, I should like to stress the notable contribution made by the three Personal Representatives of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office responsible for efforts to combat all forms of intolerance and discrimination, and the need for them to be given adequate

resources, proportional to the volume of the abuses suffered by the various religious communities.

To conclude, I should like to underline the importance attached by the Algerian delegation to the adoption by this conference, following the example of the preceding conferences devoted to other forms of intolerance, of a plan of action containing practical recommendations for countering the phenomenon of Islamophobia.

Today, we are at the beginning of a process initiated by Spain for considering Islamophobia and putting an end to one insidious form of discrimination. In seeking to perform this task, which is not an easy one, it is important that the OSCE participating States should rise to the challenges posed by such a phenomenon. It is also important that the question of Islamophobia should be tackled in similar fashion in other relevant international forums, and in particular within the framework of the United Nations.