

SPEECH DELIVERED BY THE AMBASSADOR OF SPAIN TO POLAND, MR. RAFAEL MENDÍVIL, ON THE OCCASION OF THE HDIM SIDE EVENT ON COMBATING INTOLERANCE AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST MUSLIMS AND EDUCATION (WARSAW, OCTOBER 25TH)

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to be here in my capacity as representative of the Chairmanship-in-Office to the OSCE and to intervene on his behalf on such an important subject as the one proposed today by this Side Event: "Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims and Education".

The Human Dimension Implementation Meeting is, as you all know, an important venue for both formal and informal discussion in matters related to Human Rights activities within the OSCE area. Side events, like this one, further enhance the value of the HDIM as such and constitute a relevant asset in the promotion of Human Rights. For this reason, I would like very much to thank COJEP International for having organized this meeting, which is another milestone in the project it initiated in 2006, and which aims at raising awareness at the political level regarding intolerance and discrimination against Muslims. In this respect, this Side Event builds upon the conclusions of a series of conferences held so far in the premises of UNESCO, United Nations and the Council of Europe.

The OSCE, like these International Organizations I just mentioned, has shown in several occasions its concerns on the increasing phenomenon of Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims. Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims is a very relevant topic of the world of today. It is tale telling about the nature of our societies, about ourselves. It involves the challenges Muslims face in being accepted as full and equal members of their respective societies, as well as the possible ways and means to be taken in order to increase mutual engagement and accommodation, including measures that might be taken by Muslims themselves.

While the focus of the OSCE on Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims has to be understood in the larger context of the OSCE's efforts to promote mutual respect and understanding to fight Intolerance and Discrimination as a whole, the Spanish Chairmanship-in-Office is of the view that the subject of

Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims is a specific issue to which the OSCE should pay due attention. This is the reason underlying the world of the Chairman-in-Office of the Organization, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Spain, Miguel Ángel Moratinos, when he announced in his opening statement before the OSCE's Permanent Council on January 11th that *it is our intention to hold during the third quarter of 2007 a Conference on Intolerance against Muslims.*

As you all are aware of, the Chairmanship's Conference on "Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims" will be held in Córdoba on October 9th and 10th of 2007. The aim of the conference is to present to political daylight in the OSCE area the phenomenon of Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims and to open-mindedly examine it with a view to offer possible remedies to this specific form of discrimination. It is conceived as a High-Level Event, and I am glad to announce here today that they participating States and Partners for Co-operation seem to respond courageously to our call as Ministers, Ministers of State, Secretaries of State and other VIPs have already confirmed their presence in this event. A high and rich participation of Civil Society is also expected, both in the NGO Meeting that will take place in the city of Jaén on October 8th as in the conference itself.

The Córdoba Conference will focus on various fields: Consequences of Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims in areas such as labor market and housing, media and public discourse as instruments to counter Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims and other active responses against Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims, including experiences from other communities, such as data collection or law enforcement.

The role of education, which is the subject of today's Side Event, will have a separate session to be dealt with in detail, as the Chairmanship attaches great importance to it.

All education systems should seek to promote tolerance and non-discrimination between all major religions. In this respect, it is necessary that promotion of an objectively true image of Islam through education is achieved. As the image of Islam is conveyed in general education throughout the OSCE area could happen to be stereotypical and conducive towards negative attitudes towards Muslim communities. Misunderstandings, even caricatures about others can lead, in many cases, to heightened antagonism and sometimes even violence. It is our common responsibility to prevent this from happening, starting from the basics (that is to say, from education), and therefore ensuring that a

proper and balanced depiction of the tenets and history of religion, as well as the interaction among religion, is passed onto our sons and daughters.

Spain is very aware of this. This is the reason why we have sponsored the United Nations International Consultative Conference on School Education in relation with Freedom of Religion and Belief, Non-Tolerance and Discrimination, which was held in Madrid in 2001. One of the axes of our Alliance of Civilizations initiative, co-sponsored with Turkey, is precisely education.

In a similar way, Spain would like to make significant contribution on this particular issue in the OSCE area. As a result, it has financed the preparation of the so-called Toledo Guidelines on Teaching about religion in the States Schools in the OSCE Region. The aim of this initiative is to provide expertise and support the OSCE participating States and Civil Society in their efforts to promote freedom of religion or belief through the active involvement of the ODHIR Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

In this regard, another important initiative of the Chairmanship-in-Office is that of holding a Youth Forum in Madrid next November 5th and 6th. As you know, the aim of a this Forum is to encourage young people to become involved in the OSCE, as well as to enable them to express their commitment to the Organization's values, among them with regard to promotion of tolerance and non-discrimination. Therefore, one of the working groups of the Forum may examine how to foster mutual awareness and understanding between cultures and religions.

I have mentioned Toledo earlier. Toledo, you will surely remember, has been seen during a period of its history as a cradle of harmony among the three historically dominant religions in Europe (Christianity, Islam and Judaism). Such atmosphere facilitated the emergence of cultural centre like the Toledo School of Translators, with prominent figures; Christians, Jews or Muslims, like *Alvaro de Oviedo* or *Bernardo el Arábigo*, which contributed a good deal to important cultural advances in Europe. It is then our responsibility to teach tolerance, to uproot false premises, to ensure that place like Toledo, when Toledo stood for wisdom-searching through knowledge of the other based upon peace, are not spare oasis in the middle of a desolated bewilderment, but beacons which lighten our way.

Thank you for you attention.

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