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**STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR LUIGI VITTORIO FERRARIS
AT THE OSCE CONFERENCE ON TOLERANCE AND THE FIGHT
AGAINST RACISM, XENOPHOBIA AND DISCRIMINATION**

Brussels, 13 and 14 September 2004

Mr. Chairman,

The Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands has already spoken on behalf of the European Union. Speaking for Italy, I should like to make only a few brief comments.

A few days ago, we had occasion to recall with sorrow the tragic events of 11 September 2001 in New York. Ten days ago, we witnessed with horror the tragedy that struck the Russian people in the town of Beslan — a drama that by engulfing hundreds of children revealed an expression of hatred as an end in itself, without so much as the most elementary sign of compassion.

In recent days, Italy too has been the victim of yet another episode of terrorism that has had as its target two young women volunteers engaged in a humanitarian mission. To them may be added the French journalists and so many other defenceless persons who are still in the hands of their hostage-takers in Iraq. The matter of the volunteers has made it impossible for Under-Secretary of State, Ms. Margherita Boniver, to be present with us today.

This conference is intended to supplement and continue the discussions we have had in Berlin and at the Internet meeting in Paris. In Berlin, the international community was unanimous in raising its voice to condemn in the strongest terms anti-Semitism in all its forms and to draw attention to the risk of this plague returning to infect our societies.

The phenomenon of intolerance is an age-old one and is today being proclaimed by terrorism as its justification — waves of violence ranging from ethnic cleansing to actual extermination. Intolerance has also frequently been artificially cultivated to give a face to the enemy and to create those reasons for hatred designed to justify conflicts that actually have their roots in a will to power and suppression.

The term “tolerance” is ambiguous. On the basis of its Latin etymology, it has the meaning of “to put up with” differences and not, as Albert Einstein once wrote, to welcome them, regarding them as an enrichment of our existence. In fact it has been said of tolerance that it is a difficult objective that we must strive to achieve.

In European societies scarred by the tragic experience of the Second World War, Governments and public opinion have been at great pains to reconstruct a space from which

racism and intolerance would be banned forever to give way to a culture of encounter and confidence. The European Union is certainly regarded as an extraordinary enterprise aimed at unifying different nations and cultures that had fought with each other for centuries. A winning enterprise of which we are proud and an example from which everyone can draw inspiration.

But in Europe too, much remains for us to do — on the one hand, to combat anti-Semitism and racism and, on the other, to enter into a dialogue with various peoples and cultures, specifically with a view to common action in the face of the phenomenon of immigration from diverse cultural environments. We must put to the test our maturity in the face of migratory flows that are frequently uncontrolled and subject to exploitation and that have shaken the social equilibrium of some communities, which have experienced certain difficulties in perceiving their new fellow citizens as an added resource.

Different religious affiliation too has ultimately led to the creation of a further element of separateness, especially as regards the Islamic immigrants, who have been affected on the one hand by the emergence of fundamentalist currents and by associated acts of terrorism, and on the other by the need to adapt themselves to the new society in which they are living and to its laws.

Fortunately, within the European Union a strong response to these phenomena of intolerance has been given by Governments and by civil society itself, which everywhere has been mobilized to develop a culture of acceptance and integration. Still, the damage being done by fundamentalist terrorism to the Islamic communities continues to be enormous, and the response of these communities in seeking to isolate these extremist and criminal fringes is therefore all the more to be admired. A few days ago, we were witness to the mature attitude taken by the Islamic community of France in the face of terrorist extortion, and I should like to quote at this point the recent statement released by the Italian Islamic community, which is just as explicit and even more courageous. It opens with these words: *“We, the Muslim men and women of Italy, are arrayed totally, absolutely and as one against the terrorism of those who by manipulating to their ends an extremist and false interpretation of Islam and by playing on ideological fanaticism have unleashed an aggressive war of terror against the entire world and the common civilization of mankind”*. The response by the Italian Government to this manifesto has been the announced establishment of an Islamic Council as the State’s interlocutor in the effort to usher in a climate of coexistence marked by mutual respect for different cultures and traditions within the framework of the principles, values and laws of the host country, thus opening the door to those who wish to become our new fellow citizens without renouncing their own identity, as is the right of all in a liberal and democratic society. This point has been recalled recently by the Italian President, Mr. Carlo Ciampi, who said: *“Our precise responsibilities are the following: to prevent effectively the causes that feed barbarism, to combat it in the strongest way possible, and to pursue the path of dialogue, which is the only one that can lead to peace and security”*. And further in this same context: *“A relationship between Europe and Islam based on mutual respect and on the ability and willingness to live together is within our grasp. The clash of civilizations is not at all an inevitable prospect”*. These thoughts have recently been given concrete form in an initiative of the Italian Minister for Foreign Affairs designed to strengthen the role of the European Union in countering terrorism through a series of countermeasures as part of a logic of dialogue with moderate Islamic circles.

I should like to conclude my remarks by emphasizing the positive role that the OSCE can play in promoting respect among different cultures. The Organization's various institutions and missions in the field are instruments of proven effectiveness in spreading this message. The OSCE could certainly have played a positive role in Chechnya also, had it been allowed to do so. In fact, this task represents the basic component of effective action to prevent conflicts and to strengthen security.