

PC.DEL/939/07
9 October 2007

ENGLISH
Original: FRENCH

**STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR ERIC LEBEDEL,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF FRANCE,
AT THE OSCE CHAIRMANSHIP CONFERENCE ON INTOLERANCE
AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST MUSLIMS**

Cordoba, 9 and 10 October 2007

Session 1

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Ministers,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I should like to add a few words, for my own country, to the statement made on behalf of the European Union, to which we fully subscribe.

I wish first of all to thank the Spanish OSCE Chairmanship for organizing this conference and to express the hope that it will allow progress to be made in identifying the causes of and possible responses to manifestations of intolerance and discrimination.

The French Government is totally resolved to combat this evil. Its commitment has been reflected, in recent years, in a significant strengthening of our means for combating racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and all forms of discrimination.

At the institutional level, we have set up a co-ordinating body attached to the Prime Minister's office, the Interministerial Committee to Combat Racism and Anti-Semitism, together with a High-Level Authority for Combating Discrimination and Promoting Equality (HALDE).

Twice — in 2003 and 2004 — we have strengthened our legislation concerning the prosecution of offences of a racist, anti-Semitic and xenophobic nature. We have also developed partnerships with Internet service providers to counter the dissemination on the Internet of racist, anti-Semitic and xenophobic material.

With regard to prevention, the national education system has taken action to combat prejudices and promote our republican values.

These protective provisions, however, can apply only to persons and not to ideas and to religious beliefs, as that would be in conflict with free expression. It is individuals who are legal subjects and can benefit from protection.

In the context of France's secularist principles, the French Council for the Muslim Religion (CFCM) was established on 3 May 2003. The CFCM has the task of settling questions relating to Muslim worship but exercises no spiritual authority, in the sense that it is not a theological body that passes judgement on religious questions.

There are nearly five million people in France who come from, or descend from people who come from, countries where Islam is the majority religion. This is the largest such community in Europe. The Muslim population is in general well integrated and feels at home in the French institutions, in which it is represented at every level. A study conducted in 2005 showed that 82 per cent of persons of Muslim origin consider that secularist principles are not in conflict with religion, and 78 per cent of them favour the French integration model.

Nevertheless, manifestations of rejection and discrimination exist. They are often linked primarily with economic and social factors or, in some cases, they reflect a serious and unacceptable confusion between the terms "Muslim", "fundamentalist", "Islamist" and "terrorist".

This confusion highlights the role that must be played, and is played, by Muslims themselves in combating extremism and radicalism. More broadly, tolerance must be exercised also within the community, whether in regard to the relations between men and women or those between religious currents within Islam.

The subject that we are considering today underlines the importance of dialogue between religions and cultures as a factor promoting tolerance between communities — for example, between Muslims and Jews. The OSCE, as a regional organization, can make its contribution in this field through its activities and good practices, particularly in the human dimension.

Mr. Chairman,

In keeping with its national priorities, France will continue to participate actively in the work done within the OSCE framework to promote tolerance and combat discrimination.

In this connection, I should like to reaffirm France's firm attachment to the role of the three personal representatives of the Chairman-in-Office concerned with combating intolerance and discrimination.

I also wish to reaffirm the support of France for the essential assistance provided to participating States by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights through its Programme on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination.

Thank you for your attention.