



**STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR TACAN İLDEM
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(Opening Plenary Session of the OSCE High-Level Conference on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination: *Combating intolerance and discrimination in the OSCE area. Implementation of the relevant OSCE commitments, Tirana, 21-22 May 2013*)

Thank you Mr. Chairperson.

I would like to join previous speakers in expressing our thanks and appreciation to the Ukrainian Chairmanship and to ODIHR for organizing this High-Level Conference on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination. I would also like to express our gratitude to the Government of Albania for generously hosting this important and timely event. We recall that during its Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in the second half of 2012, Albania had included intercultural dialogue and education on tolerance among its priorities, and we appreciate our hosts' continuing engagement in this area.

The determination of the OSCE participating States to combat intolerance and discrimination is attested to in the numerous commitments that we have undertaken over the past decades, which are reflected in the key documents of our Organization starting from the Helsinki Final Act as well as in a number of Ministerial Council decisions. However, as I have stated on many occasions including at the Permanent Council, there is no doubt the far more needs to be done by the OSCE and the participating States in this field, through ensuring full implementation of the existing commitments. Racism, xenophobia and discrimination based on religion, race, ethnicity, language and other characteristics continue to be issues of grave concern in the OSCE region. Persons perceived to be "others" suffer discrimination on a widespread and daily basis in many participating States. At this stage I will suffice by recalling the relevant sessions of last year's Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, during which a large number of non-governmental organizations provided vivid and unsettling examples of the gravity of the situation on the ground. The lack of mutual respect and understanding can and does lead to acts of hostility which violate the human rights and fundamental freedoms of those who are the victims of intolerance and discrimination.

Against this backdrop, it is all the more regrettable that we have been unable to adopt any Ministerial Council decisions in the human dimension in the previous two years, thus also missing a valuable opportunity to reaffirm our commitments on combating intolerance, discrimination, racism and xenophobia. We must consider the OSCE, with its comprehensive approach to security, as an important platform for tackling the issue of tolerance and non-discrimination. As participating States, it is up to each and every one of us to make optimal use of the opportunities and advantages provided by our Organization in this field.

We believe that our discussions over the next two days will provide a valuable opportunity to assess the implementation of existing commitments, to take stock of recent developments and worrying trends, to share recommendations and to develop ideas for charting the way forward. It is our hope and expectation that the outputs of this Conference will contribute to the formulation of a draft decision in the area of tolerance and non-discrimination for adoption at this year's Ministerial Council meeting in Kyiv.

In closing, I would like to wish us all a very fruitful and productive Conference.

Thank you.