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Address of

**Ambassador/Ashraf Gamal Rashed
Deputy Minister For European Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Egypt**

**On behalf of
H.E Mr. Ahmed Aboul Gheit
Minister of Foreign Affairs of Egypt**

To

**The OSCE Ministerial Meeting
Sofia, 6-7 December 2004**

Mr. Chairman,

I am pleased to address this important OSCE Meeting on behalf of Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit, the Foreign Minister of Egypt, who extends his sincere greetings to all participants wishing you success in your deliberations.

We equally thank the Government of Bulgaria for the warm welcome we received and greatly appreciate Bulgaria's most able leadership of the Organization during the past year, and commend Slovenia, the incoming Chairman-in Office, for guiding the work of the Mediterranean Partners' Contact Group, assuring her of our full support.

Egypt has been, and will continue, an active Mediterranean Partner for Cooperation, with a keen interest to contribute positively in furthering the dialogue and relations between the OSCE and its partners, participating in various OSCE activities.

Last month, Egypt hosted, and for the third time, a Mediterranean Seminar in Sharm El-Sheikh, attended by 37 delegations from OSCE Member States, all six Mediterranean Partners, two Asian Partners and ten International Organizations and Institutions. Our gratitude is due to all participants who contributed to its success, foremost the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, H.E. Solomon Passy, the Foreign Minister of Bulgaria. We also thank the energetic Secretariat for its efforts in organizing the seminar.

The 2004 Mediterranean Seminar has discussed ways to address threats to security in the 21st Century through the interaction between the OSCE and the Mediterranean Partners. It highlighted the possibilities for Partners to draw on OSCE expertise and experience in CSBMs, stressing the importance of mutually shared transparency and trust. Several ideas were presented in that respect that will be pursued.

The participants also stressed the need for cooperative strategies in dealing with threats, in a comprehensive manner.

As indicated in the address of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Egypt at the opening of the Seminar, "We do not concur with the claim that the Middle East is the main source of terrorism and security threats." There have been several factors, domestic and external that lead to the aggravation of violence and terrorism in various regions of the world.

We appreciate the multi-dimensional approach of the OSCE in addressing those threats, encompassing not only the security aspects, but also the political, economic and social factors, as well as the conditions exploited by some to justify the unjustifiable.

Suffice it to say, the continuation of unresolved conflicts in our region is a source of threat and instability, not only to the region, but to its geopolitical neighborhood, the OSCE area.

The Palestinian question remains the core of conflict in the Middle East. The people of the region could not enjoy the aspired peace and development until the comprehensive, just and lasting settlement is achieved in accordance with the relevant U.N. resolutions, and the principle of land for peace, as also reaffirmed in the Arab Peace Initiative adopted by the Beirut Arab League Summit in 2002. A

settlement based on the realization of a two-state solution, as envisaged in the Road Map, a Palestinian State which is sovereign, independent and viable, living side by side in peace and security with Israel.

At this crucial juncture, support is needed from the International Community and all parties to further the peace process. In the immediate future, priority should be given to help facilitate a smooth transfer of power in the Palestinian Territories.

While the Palestinian side has committed itself to free and fair elections, Israel should equally fulfill its obligations. We hope the OSCE will respond favorably to the invitation of the Palestinian Central Elections Commission to observe the Palestinian elections scheduled for the 9th of January 2005. At the same time, we support the request of the Palestinian Authority to be granted the status of OSCE Mediterranean Partner for Cooperation. We feel that this step would enhance the ongoing dialogue with the partners, and further the cause of peace in our region benefiting from the OSCE's experience

Another challenge in the region is the situation in Iraq. Two weeks ago, Egypt hosted an International Conference on Iraq, also in Sharm El-Sheikh, which underscored the objective of safeguarding the unity of Iraq, and restoring stability, full sovereignty and prosperity for Iraq and its people, reaffirming support for security Council Resolution 1546, and underscoring the leading role of the United Nations.

Mr. Chairman,

Grave concern also emanates from the possession by some in the Middle East of nuclear capabilities. This constitutes a major threat to regional and international security. As you are aware, Egypt advocated since 1990 an initiative to make the Middle East a Zone Free of Weapons of Mass Destruction, in a comprehensive manner that applies to all without exception or discrimination. We are fully committed to this objective.

Mr. Chairman,

The Sharm El-Sheikh Mediterranean Seminar emphasized the importance of promoting the principles of cultural and religious understanding, as well as tolerance and acceptance of the other. Indeed we have to harness those principles and pursue a more genuine interaction that overcomes the elements of ignorance and prejudice.

We do agree on the necessity of overcoming all forms of religious intolerance and ensuring respect for the different religions; particularly as we are witnessing with concern in parts of the world defamation campaigns to which Islam has recently fallen prey and its followers attacked. Thus, we deem it necessary that the international community should adopt a common position addressing all forms of religious intolerance impartially on equal footing. Granting a privileged status to one religion or its followers over others, or being selective is counter productive. We commend the efforts undertaken by the Chairman-in-Office in that respect.

We equally believe that the initiative of the Prime Minister of Spain promoting the idea of an "Alliance between Civilizations" is a valuable endeavor which deserves full support.

Consequently, the conference which will be hosted in Cordoba in 2005 should address intolerance against all religions and cultures in a balanced manner.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me reiterate Egypt's intention to intensify its participation in the activities of the OSCE and continue to explore practical means for advancing cooperation for our mutual benefit, while taking into account the specifics of our region and our priorities and concerns.