



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

**Secretary General Marc Perrin de Brichambaut
Alliance of Civilizations Forum
Madrid, January 2008**

Your excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure and an honour for me to participate in this first meeting of the Alliance of Civilizations Forum here in Madrid, which comes after a very successful year for the OSCE under the 2007 Spanish Chairmanship.

At the outset, allow me to express my congratulations for the excellent work conducted by the Alliance of Civilizations until now, under the able leadership of H.E. Mr. Sampaio. In looking at the annotated agenda of today's forum, I see much that is of relevance to the OSCE, including managing diversity, the role of the media, conflict prevention and youth. I welcome the fact that the agenda is entirely action- and result-oriented, as well as the proposals for a rapid response media mechanism and for AoC national plans, as well as a youth solidarity fund.

The Alliance of Civilizations Initiative bears particular significance for the OSCE. It is an initiative promoted by two prominent OSCE participating States, Spain and Turkey. At two Ministerial Council meetings -- in Ljubljana in 2005 and Madrid in 2007 -- the OSCE has expressly chosen to lend the Alliance its support.

The OSCE has been involved from the outset, and was quick to decide to prepare a contribution to the debate within the High Level Group, highlighting the Organization's 30-year efforts to promote cultural and religious dialogue, as well as personal liberty, tolerance and non-discrimination. In its contribution, the OSCE defined *itself* as an alliance of civilizations in action, signalling the affinity between our Organization and the goals of the Initiative. The contribution was presented by the then Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE, Belgian Foreign Minister Karel de Gucht, together with the OSCE Secretary General, to then-UN Secretary General H.E. Kofi Annan in July 2006.

The struggle against intolerance and discrimination remains at the centre of the OSCE's work. Our starting point is the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, with its emphasis on promoting the 'inherent dignity of the individual' and the commitment by all participating States to 'recognize and respect the freedom of the individual to profess and practice, alone or in community with others, religion or belief acting in accordance with the dictates of his own conscience.'

As an organization that deals with security in all of its facets, we believe that our states and their citizens can only be secure within societies built on foundations that ensure respect for each individual citizen and each community. Since its inception, the OSCE has spearheaded the belief that respect for human rights is part and parcel of security and a fundamental pre-requisite for stable and peaceful societies.

Furthermore, our modern societies are complex, multi-cultural, globalized structures and are often built upon fragile architectures. A challenge we share across the OSCE area, from Vancouver to Vladivostok, is that of integrating diversity into healthy societies and legitimate polities.

Under the Spanish Chairmanship, the OSCE continued to pay considerable attention to tolerance and non-discrimination. The OSCE Chairmanship High Level conference on discrimination against Muslims, held in Cordoba last October, was a major landmark, together with last May's Bucharest High Level conference on combating discrimination and promoting mutual respect and understanding.

Both conferences addressed many issues that are at the core of the Alliance's work. They reiterated the participating States' determination to take resolute action to counter all forms of discrimination and intolerance. In particular, they recalled their commitments to raise awareness of the value of cultural and religious diversity as a source of mutual enrichment of societies and to recognize the importance of integration with respect for cultural and religious diversity.

The three Personal Representatives of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office on tolerance-related matters also continued their relentless work aimed at raising awareness among participating States of the risks and specific challenges posed by issues such as anti-Semitism and discrimination against Muslims and Christians. Their contribution to the Organization remains very valuable.

The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, through its tolerance and non-discrimination programme, but also through its Advisory Panel on Freedom of Religion, remains the primary OSCE tool in this area, and a natural partner for the Alliance of Civilizations.

Among the many initiatives undertaken in the OSCE framework in 2007, I would highlight the publication of the *Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools*, which are aimed at both legislators and schools, offering guidance on preparing curricula for teaching about religions and beliefs, preferred procedures for ensuring fairness in the development of curricula, and standards for how they could be implemented. As such, this could be a valuable instrument that can be used in implementing also the goals of the Alliance.

Tolerance and non-discrimination also featured prominently in the OSCE's work with its Partners for Co-operation.

In particular, last December the OSCE gathered, for the first time since 1996, in Tel Aviv for its annual Mediterranean Seminar. The Seminar focused on promoting various aspects of tolerance and non-discrimination, including migration, gender, media and education. For the first time, also, we saw healthy participation from civil society. A preparatory event for Mediterranean NGOs was organized by ODIHR on the eve of the Seminar. The recommendations stemming from the Seminar, and from the NGO event, will form the basis of the OSCE's work with the Mediterranean Partners in 2008.

As Chairman of the OSCE this year, Finland will place priority on three issues broadly related to the agenda of the Alliance of Civilisations. First, the struggle against trafficking in

human beings will be pursued with increasing vigour. A particular issue to be tackled in this respect concerns the identification and protection of child victims by the 56 participating States of the OSCE.

Under Finland's leadership, work will be intensified to raise awareness of the dangers of intolerance -- including anti-Semitism, discrimination against Muslims, and many other forms of intolerance. In this area, the OSCE Chairmanship will seek for more to be done to fight discrimination against the Roma and Sinti people.

Recognizing the fundamental importance of gender equality to the development of healthy and tolerant societies, Finland will seek also to pursue further gender mainstreaming across all of the activities of the OSCE.

Your excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

In essence, my message to you today is that the OSCE has already been active in contributing to the Alliance of Civilizations and will be happy to consider a further appropriate contribution within the remit of the Organization's mandate.

Indeed, at the recent Madrid Ministerial Council, the participating States specifically requested me to report to the Permanent Council on the debate at today's Forum, as they continue to view the work of the Alliance as a matter of direct concern to them.