

MC.DEL/63/05
6 December 2005

ENGLISH only

Statement of
Ambassador Ashraf Gamal Rashed
Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Egypt

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

To
The 13th OSCE Ministerial Council Meeting
Ljubljana, 5-6 December 2005

Check against delivery

Mr. Chairman,

At the outset, I wish to express gratitude to you, Dr. Rupel, and to the government of Slovenia for the warm welcome and hospitality we received since our arrival to your beautiful country, and for the excellent organization of this important meeting. I equally extend our great appreciation to your wise and able leadership and your keen interest to promote further dialogue and cooperation with the Mediterranean Partners.

May I thank Ambassador Crombrugghe of Belgium, Chairman of the Contact Group with Mediterranean Partners for progress achieved, and wish Belgium a most successful tenure as the Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE for the coming year. We also seize this opportunity to assure Spain, a fellow Mediterranean Country, of our full support, as it assumes the Chairmanship of the Mediterranean Contact Group.

Mr. Chairman,

Egypt's long-standing relationship with the OSCE goes back to the beginning of the Helsinki process based on a firm conviction of the interdependence between security in

Europe and in the Mediterranean. We continued to actively participate in many of its fora and sought to strengthen our dialogue with the organization and learn from its valuable experience with regard to the comprehensive approach to security.

In our view, this year's Ministerial Council has a special significance, as we witness a growing recognition within the organization of the need to respond to new and increasing challenges.

It has equally led to more dynamism towards further promoting the relationship with Mediterranean Partners.

Mr. Chairman,

Our meeting takes place amid various regional and international developments, some of which represent a challenge to peace and security, while others give reason for cautious optimism.

Although we have not attempted to directly involve the OSCE in the quest for peace in the Middle East, the fact remains that the absence of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace, that encompasses ensuring security for all countries,

precludes parties in the region from applying the progressive Confidence and Security Building measures that have proven effective in the framework of the OSCE. Support to the peace process is vital, from the international community, including the OSCE and its Member States.

Egypt supports the request of Palestinian Authority to join the Partners dialogue with the OSCE.

On the other hand, the situation in Iraq remains a critical issue. Two weeks ago, the League of Arab States hosted in Cairo a preparatory meeting for a wide range of Iraqi leaders aiming to achieve national reconciliation and to ensure the participation of all parties in the political process. This is an important element towards our common objective, in rebuilding Iraq, restoring stability, safeguarding its unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Mr. Chairman,

We have followed the concern of the OSCE with regard to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, a concern we share.

We reiterate our commitment to continue working with our partners in the international community towards the realization of the universal adherence to the international instruments on the elimination of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction, in particular the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, and urge States not party to these instruments to accede to them. We remain convinced that the establishment of a zone free of all weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East is crucial for enhancing the security of our region, as well as Europe, and the world at large.

Egypt has been calling since 1990 for the adoption of President Mubarak's initiative in that respect.

Mr. Chairman,

Terrorism constitutes a threat to all societies and to human civilization. While many important steps have been taken to combat terrorism, I underscore that we have yet to devise a global and comprehensive strategy to address this scourge in all its aspects and complex factors. Egypt's initiative on holding an international conference under the

auspices of the United Nations remains an effective step towards that end.

We follow the OSCE's multi-dimensional efforts in combating terrorism, and appreciate that "The OSCE Charter on Preventing and Combating Terrorism – 2002" reaffirmed the rejection of identifying terrorism with any nationality or religion, as well as underlying the need to address the "root causes" of terrorism.

With regard to the OSCE reform process, we would like to stress the importance of the integration of the Mediterranean dimension in this process, as some priority areas in the report of the Panel of Eminent Persons are of relevance to ongoing dialogue and possible areas of cooperation with Mediterranean Partners including promotion of tolerance, issues related to migration, confidence building measures, elimination of weapons of mass destruction, and terrorism .

Certainly, our efforts to enhance security could benefit from the accumulated experiences and mechanisms of security institutions in Europe. However, we should not be oblivious to the fact that strategic, political and cultural

characteristics and conditions of the Middle East are different and no ready-made model or blueprint can be automatically transplanted therein.

Mr.Chairman,

We also share the organization's commitment for promoting tolerance and non discrimination and respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law.

We greatly appreciate the emphasis accorded by OSCE against acts and manifestations of hate, and in favour of tolerance, mutual respect and understanding.

In the same vain, we commend the initiative of the Prime Minister of Spain on the "Alliance of Civilizations", and welcome the establishment by the United Nations Secretary General of a High-Level Group of Eminent Persons to promote this very positive initiative, which deserves all support.

We firmly believe that the OSCE should double it's efforts to raise awareness and develop concrete measures to

counter prejudice, intolerance and defamation, and ensure respect of religious and cultural diversity.

We are very concerned due to emergence of a tendency to associate terrorism with Islam. Actually, the images of Islam and Muslims portrayed in some societies have reflected a lack of understanding or proper knowledge of the Islamic faith, thus sowing the seeds of fear and hostility towards Muslims. It is regrettable that in some cases media has disseminated negative stereotyping of Islam, in a manner that offends millions of Muslims all over the world. In this regard, I trust you agree that insult or mockery of a religion or its symbols, in no way comes under freedom of expression but rather under incitement of hatred.

We note that the Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE has requested the Personal Representative on discrimination against Muslims to investigate this matter. We hope that Ambassador Orhun will be fully supported in his mission. We also hope that the organization would utilize its acquis and institutions in a balanced non selective approach to address the phenomenon of intolerance and discrimination, through concrete measures, including by activating the role

of the ODIHR in data collection, analysis and reporting of discrimination and hate crimes, as well as awareness raising of tolerance towards Muslims through elaborating a code of conduct for media professionals.

We support the proposal to convene a special conference on the issue of discrimination against Muslims, in line with OSCE present and future endeavors to address all forms of intolerance.

Mr. Chairman,

In conclusion, I would like to reassure you that Egypt will continue to be an active partner in our common endeavor to uphold our shared values, and deal successfully with the opportunities and challenges to global peace and security.

Thank you.