



Arab Republic of Egypt

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Statement by

H.E Mr. Ahmed Aboul Gheit

Minister of Foreign Affairs of Egypt

At

The OSCE Ministerial Council

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Delivered on his behalf by

Ambassador Ehab Fawzy

**Permanent Representative of the
Arab Republic of Egypt
To the Organization for Security and
Cooperation in Europe**

Check against Delivery

Excellency Alexander Stubb,
Foreign Minister of Finland,
Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit, I have the honor to address this important meeting of the Ministerial Council.

The Minister has asked me to convey his regrets for not being able to be with you today, and due to pressing engagements, has asked me to read the following statement on his behalf:

I would like to express our sincere gratitude to the Government of Finland for the warm hospitality, and to express our appreciation to the Finnish Chairmanship for the wise and competent leadership that guided the work of the organization over the past year.

I would like to extend my appreciation to Ambassador Brichambaut, Secretary General of the OSCE, as well as to the Greek Chairmanship of the Contact Group with Mediterranean Partners for their valuable contributions to the promotion of the Mediterranean dimension of the OSCE.

Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Egypt has always maintained that, due to historical, cultural, economic and political factors, the Mediterranean has the potential to be the model of integration between developed and developing countries. Towards this end, we have emphasized the necessity to manage this relationship in a manner that meets the mutual interests of both shores of the Mediterranean.

In this regard, we view the OSCE while being a major player for strengthening and enhancing stability, security and cooperation in Europe, as an important model for security in the Mediterranean as a whole with its well-recognized asset the “comprehensive approach to security” – as well as the expertise and knowledge it has accumulated over the years in the different aspects of security whether political, economic, or humanitarian.

Egypt believes that the cooperation between the OSCE and its Mediterranean Partners should be based on identifying areas of consensus about the common threats facing us. These include the ongoing efforts to reach a just and peaceful settlement for the Middle East conflict, Non-proliferation concerns in the Mediterranean region as well as in the wider Middle East region, as well as the consequences of the global financial crisis and its negative implications to both shores of the Mediterranean. Added to these, are the

ongoing challenges in the areas of fighting intolerance and non-discrimination, terrorism, drugs and human trafficking, organized crime and environmental degradation.

Mr. Chairman

The danger of terrorism is one of the major areas of common interest between the OSCE and its Mediterranean Partners.

We appreciate the OSCE's multi-dimensional efforts in combating terrorism, which we view as a valuable source of inspiration to Mediterranean Partners. In this context we would like to refer to "The OSCE Charter on Preventing and Combating Terrorism" (2002), which recognized the necessity for a coordinated and comprehensive approach for combating terrorism. We would like to stress that the charter reaffirmed the rejection of identifying terrorism with any nationality or religion, and the need to address root causes of terrorism such as; discrimination, intolerance, and poverty.

In this context, Egypt encourages furthering experience sharing between OSCE and the Partners and regional Organizations such as the Arab League to identify areas of common interest and concern and possibilities for further coordinated action in accordance with the provisions of the "OSCE strategy to Address Threats to Security and Stability in the Twenty –First Century", in which the participating states pledge to intensify cooperation with the OSCE's Mediterranean and Asian Partners.

Besides terrorism, our region's security is affected by two other factors.

First. The necessity of achieving just political solutions to existing regional conflicts. The Arab-Israeli conflict remains the overwhelming source of tension and instability in the Middle East. Only Israel's full withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories and the establishment of a viable Palestinian state alongside Israel can bring about genuine and lasting peace, as well as security and stability to the Mediterranean region.

In this regard, we would like to reiterate Egypt's strong support to the request of the Palestinian Authority to be granted the status of Mediterranean Partner for Cooperation, which dates back to 2004. We urge the OSCE Member States, as well as the Incoming Greek Chairmanship, to put this issue on our agenda with the view of enhancing and strengthening relations with the Mediterranean Partners and thus furthering the cause of peace in the region.

Second. The inability to establish a zone free of Weapons of Mass destruction. While there is a universal acknowledgement that the proliferation of such weapons poses a threat to international peace, the inability to establish such a zone in the Middle East is not only counter-productive, but serves against the OSCE Principles Governing Non-Proliferation (December 1994) in which Participating States affirmed their commitment to prevent proliferation of nuclear weapons, and endorsed the universal adherence to the NPT. We therefore call upon Israel the only state in the Middle East that is not party to the NPT, to join the NPT, and to place all its nuclear facilities under comprehensive IAEA safeguards.

Mr. Chairman

Allow me to elaborate on another issue of special relevance for the relationship between the OSCE and its Mediterranean partners, namely the issue of tolerance. At this juncture, I wish to register our satisfaction of the efforts of the OSCE to move towards a more realistic and balanced approach on the issue of tolerance.

We note that all three Personal Representatives are fulfilling their mandates with professionalism. We request the OSCE Chairman-in-Office to intensify the efforts of the OCSE in the field of fighting intolerance and discrimination, especially in the domains of education and awareness raising, which includes an active role for ODIHR in data collection and analysis and reporting of hate crimes and discrimination against Muslims, and in awareness raising of tolerance and respect towards them and in developing educational curricula that promote tolerance.

Mr. Chairman,

Closely linked to the issue of intolerance is the relationship between the right to freedom of expression and tolerance. No one questions the right to freedom of expression. It is one of the fundamental human rights upheld by international legal instruments. But it is not absolute. It is a right conditioned by standards that are internationally accepted as reflected in numerous international legal instruments.

While the exercise of the right to freedom of expression should be upheld, it is in no one's interest that this be done in a manner that encourages intolerance of racial, ethnic groups, and above all religious groups and which could be regarded as incitement against those groups.

In this context, Egypt proposes that the OSCE organizes a seminar on the Media Self-Regulation Guidebook published April 2008 by the Special Representative on the Freedom of the Media. Such an event should be organized in cooperation with the three Personal Representative on combating Discrimination. It would offer an opportunity to introduce the Guidebook to Media Professionals from both Partner and Participating states and raise awareness of the value of respect to diversity.

This seminar can also address the challenge of trying to respect freedom of expression without offending the fundamental and diverse believes of other communities. While the Media Self regulation Guidebook suggested that self regulation of the media can provide this compromise, through a self-regulatory manner, we believe that it is the responsibility and duty of governments to play a constructive role in this regard, by putting relevant legislations and regulations in place and by adopting adequate cultural strategies built on the respect for different civilizations and religions and the acceptance of cultural pluralism.

The importance of these issues should not be underestimated, especially in light of the recent publishing of ODIHR's 2007 report on Hate crimes, which stated that Hate-motivated crimes against Muslims and members of other religions continued to be significantly under-reported and under-recorded and these incidents were often fuelled by a combination of racism, powerful anti-immigrant sentiment and the association of Muslims and Islam with terrorism.

This proves once more the importance of the issue of migration and integration of migrants and how it is closely linked to intolerance problems. We are pleased therefore to note that Greece, as the upcoming Chairmanship, has decided to put the issue of migration as one of its priorities. In this regard, we support the establishment of a working group on migration issues.

Mr. Chairman,

Over the years, the framework of cooperation between the OSCE and its Partners for Cooperation has been developing.

The establishment of a Partnership Fund in the Madrid Ministerial Conference is a positive step.

In this regard Egypt is looking forward to use this fund with the aim of strengthening the relationship between the organization and Partner states. This is reflected by the fact the Egypt has pledged 10 thousand Euros for the fund.

We furthermore believe in establishing a long term vision and plan of action for the Mediterranean Dialogue and for the implementation of the recommendations of previous Mediterranean Seminars including establishing a checklist of proposals and setting tools for the follow up of the past Mediterranean Seminars. We call upon Participating and Partner States to lend political will and support to measures, decisions, and mechanisms needed for sustaining the momentum the relationship with Mediterranean Partners has gained.

Thank You.