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Joint statement to OSCE Permanent Council on “Commitments regarding Tolerance and Non-Discrimination: Ensuring Freedom of Religion or Belief”

21 March 2024

Thank you, Türkiye, for raising this important issue.

I am delivering this statement on behalf of Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland, and my own country, the United Kingdom.

In recent weeks and months, and in particular since the 7 October terrorist attacks by Hamas, we have seen a shocking increase in hatred and intolerance, including anti-Muslim hatred. This is completely unacceptable.

Our governments strongly condemn discrimination, intolerance, and incitement to hatred and violent extremism in all their forms. No one should ever be a victim of hatred because of their religion or belief, whether Muslim, Jewish, Christian, or other.

We call attention to people around the world who are harassed, detained, imprisoned, or even killed for identifying as Muslim, being perceived as Muslim, practicing Islam, or converting to Islam. ODIHR’s hate crime report shows that anti-Muslim threats and violence, including attacks against people and on property, continue to be a problem across the OSCE region.

As ODIHR Director Matteo Mecacci said last week, it is important to take urgent action and ensure we avoid stigmatisation or inflammatory rhetoric. Thankfully, the recognition that more dialogue and understanding are needed is growing.

We will continue to advocate for and promote freedom of religion of belief for all. Protecting the individual is at the heart of human rights. The rights to freedom of religion and freedom of expression are equally important pillars of any pluralistic society. We will continue to speak out on behalf of those who have been denied the ability to do so and who have suffered intolerance, discrimination, and repression as a result. As Muslims worldwide mark the holy month of Ramadan, a time of fasting and caring for communities, we again urge all OSCE participating States and institutions to continue their work to combat hatred on the basis of religion or belief; and to uphold freedom of religion or belief and freedom of expression.

Thank you.