



Declaration of the Anna Lindh Foundation on the release of “Innocence of the Muslims” and the violence in the Region

Alexandria (Egypt), 15th of September 2012: The Anna Lindh Foundation expresses its deep concern for the release of the provocative film called “Innocence of Muslims”, which constitutes an offense to Muslims around the world, and for the violent reactions of extremist groups whose attacks on diplomatic delegations have led to destruction and death.

As an institution devoted to promoting mutual respect and coexistence between cultures and civilizations in the Euro-Mediterranean Region, the Anna Lindh Foundation condemns any incitement to sectarian odium and reiterates that respect for religious beliefs and rejection of violence must be cornerstones of democracy, humanism and modernity.

“Innocence of Muslims” is an inflammatory pamphlet, the distribution of which - on the anniversary of the terrorist attacks of September 11th - cannot be abridged to a manifestation of freedom of expression. The instant dissemination of its content through online media was aimed at provoking a social unrest, as with the distribution of Cartoons which mocked Prophet Muhammad and the short film “Fitna” based on the amalgam of extreme images and quotes of the Quran. On both occasions, the Anna Lindh Foundation condemned actions which endangered the capacity of people of different origins, cultures and beliefs to live together. The Foundation reiterates this condemnation, underlining that human rights such as ‘freedom of expression’ or ‘human dignity and mutual respect’ are indivisible, and cannot be used selectively to promote ethnic or religious confrontations.

The crisis triggered by this distressing initiative comes at a historical moment for the region, when many Arab countries are involved in

democratic transitions. Despite their difficulties and setbacks, these transitions have created better conditions for dialogue and cooperation between Arab and European societies. Last week events might threaten this achievements.

Nevertheless, the vast majority of Muslim public opinion has expressed its anger to the release of the film peacefully and individually, and the Arab governments of the region have reiterated their commitment with cultural inclusiveness while condemning the attacks to diplomatic delegations and the killing of the American Ambassador and other civil servants in Benghazi. This mainstream nonviolent reaction should be the basis for a common and shared pledge focused on restoring trust and rebuilding the cultural bridges which might have once again been damaged.

The Anna Lindh Foundation will respond to this new episode of provocation and violence by strengthening its intercultural mission. In collaboration with its National Networks, the Foundation is fulfilling a wide range of programmes, promoting better understanding and mutual respect, fostering the active participation of citizens in public life, and bringing people together across the Mediterranean to work on shared democratic values.

Secretariat of the Anna Lindh Foundation