Opening Speech by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Selman Dursun (Director, Istanbul University Penal Law and Criminology Application and Research Center)

Dear Dean, esteemed speakers, distinguished guests, colleagues, and students,

It is my great pleasure and honor to welcome you all to today's panel, organized by the Istanbul University Penal Law and Criminology Application and Research Center. I would like to express my sincere thanks to all participants, particularly our esteemed speakers, for contributing their time and expertise to this important academic event.

Today's panel - *"Freedom of Expression vs. Hate Speech: Comparative Legal Analyses of the Protection of Religious Values in National and International Contexts"* - addresses one of the most important and sensitive issues in contemporary legal discourse. The tension between safeguarding freedom of expression and protecting individuals and communities from hate speech has become increasingly prominent across legal systems worldwide.

We are especially grateful to Assoc. Prof. Dr. Heybatollah Najandimanesh from one of the most prestigious universities in Iran, Allameh Tabataba'i University, for joining us today. His keynote will examine a recent and controversial Swedish court ruling in which a demonstrator was convicted for acts such as burning the Quran and making offensive statements about Islam. The court found that these actions went beyond the boundaries of protected expression and amounted to hate speech targeting Muslims as a group. This case highlights how national courts navigate the difficult line between criticism of religion and incitement to hatred, and how constitutional freedoms are balanced against international human rights standards.

Following the keynote, our distinguished panelists will expand the discussion through international and comparative perspectives. We will examine the frameworks of the United Nations and Turkish penal law. Our aim is to deepen our understanding, foster scholarly dialogue, and perhaps contribute to the development of more balanced and rights-respecting approaches to these complex legal questions.

May today's discussions inspire thoughtful reflection, encourage mutual understanding, and pave the way for meaningful progress in protecting both freedom and respect. I wish you all a fruitful and engaging session.

Thank you.