



STATEMENT OF THE HOLY SEE
2017 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
Working Session 5: Public and political participation
Warsaw, 13 September 2017

Mr. Moderator,

The importance of participation in political and public life is firmly enshrined in OSCE commitments, beginning with the Helsinki Final Act (Decalogue, Principle VII), and is recognized as a fundamental human right by *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (artt. 21, 27).

Participation in community life is not only one of the greatest aspirations of the citizen, called to exercise freely and responsibly his or her civic role with and for others, but is also one of the pillars of all democratic orders and one of the major guarantees of the permanence of the democratic system.¹ All OSCE participating States, and indeed all States, are bound to protect and promote participation in political and public life and to encourage the effective exercise of civil, political, social, cultural, and other rights and freedoms, all of which derive from the inherent dignity of the human person and are essential for his or her free and full development.

In the last few decades, the presence and participation of women, younger people, ethnic and religious groups, persons with disabilities, Roma and Sinti, and national minorities in the social, economic, cultural and political spheres has gradually increased. Our Delegation is convinced that there is not only room for a greater involvement of these groups, but also a need for engagement and ownership by all sectors of society in the public and political field and arena.

On the participation of religious and belief communities in public life and dialogue, participating States have committed to encourage their inclusion “in public discussions of pertinent legislative initiatives [as well as to] [p]romote dialogue between religious or belief communities and governmental bodies, including, where necessary, on issues related to the use of places of worship and religious property”².

¹ Compendium of Catholic Social Doctrine, n. 190

² MC.DEC/3/13 of 6 December 2013.

Pope Francis has cast light on the contribution that Christianity can offer to the development of Europe today within the context of a correct relationship between religion and society. “In the Christian vision,” - the Holy Father recalls – “faith and reason, religion and society, are called to enlighten and support one another, and, whenever necessary, to purify one another from ideological extremes. European society as a whole cannot fail to benefit from a renewed interplay between these two sectors, whether to confront a form of religious fundamentalism which is above all inimical to God, or to remedy a reductive rationality which does no honor to man.”³

Dialogue between religion and society fosters peaceful coexistence that enables all religions to live side by side and in mutual respect. The Holy See believes that the existence of a spirit of mutual respect between society and religion contributes to the healthy development of society, which will have as its foundation a sound understanding of human nature and full respect for inalienable human rights. We remain convinced that dialogue and partnerships constitute important means to promote confidence, trust, reconciliation, understanding, and peace.

The Delegation of the Holy See wishes to make the following two recommendations:

- that participating States continue their implementation of the Ministerial Council Decision 3/13 on Freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief;
- that ODIHR consider elaborating a compendium of States’ best practices on engaging with religions in public debate.

Thank you, Mr. Moderator.

³ *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the European Parliament and to the Council of Europe, Strasbourg, Franc, Tuesday, 25 November 2014.*