



**STATEMENT OF THE HOLY SEE**  
**2017 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting**  
*Working Session 6: Freedom of religion or belief*  
**Warsaw, 14 September 2017**

Mr. Moderator,

Both the OSCE and the principles of international law recognize that freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) belong to the essential core of natural rights, and since Helsinki, we have developed effective tools to uphold this freedom during meetings in Madrid, Vienna, Copenhagen and, most recently, in Kiev in 2013.

Freedom of religion or belief is the pinnacle of all other freedoms and far from being a mere concession of society or State, is a sacred, inalienable, and universal right rooted in the dignity of the person, created in the image of God and endowed with reason and free will. Religious freedom encompasses not only the freedom to manifest one's religion or belief, on the individual and collective levels, through worship, teaching, practice, and observance, but also the freedom to follow one's conscience in religious matters and the freedom to live coherently by manifesting one's beliefs in public, without being coerced to conceal them.<sup>1</sup>

Attempts to diminish the role of religion in public life represent not only a reductionist notion of the nature of the human person, but also stifle the development of authentic peace and almost certainly cause a less just society. Pope Francis has repeatedly warned against attempts to reduce religion to the sphere of the private or personal or to reduce religion to a subculture, but he insists rather that "*it is part of the culture of every people and every nation*".<sup>2</sup> Thus, the commitments of the OSCE and the words of His Holiness are oriented towards the same goal: to ensure and facilitate FoRB and to foster a climate of mutual respect and tolerance for all humans of good will.

My Delegation further notes that OSCE commitments seek to eliminate all subtle forms of religious intolerance and discrimination, including those concealed in the registration of religious communities or associations. In this regard, the Holy See would like to recall that in the Vienna Document 1989, participating States

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<sup>1</sup> Cfr. Statement PC.SHDM.DEL/4/17, 23 June 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, Meeting for Religious Liberty, Philadelphia, September 2015.

committed to ensuring the freedom to profess and practice religion or belief, and to, *inter alia*, “(16.3) [...] – grant upon their request to communities of believers, practicing or prepared to practice their faith within the constitutional framework of their States, recognition of the status provided for them in their respective countries”<sup>3</sup>. While the establishment of registration mechanisms for religious communities, enabling these communities to function within the administrative and legislative parameters of a given State in accordance with the rule of law, are clearly in line with this OSCE commitment, States should be vigilant that such mechanisms do not become in and of themselves a violation of the freedom of religion or belief. Moreover, it should always be kept in mind that in the regime that governs access to legal personality, participating States must also respect the autonomy of religious or belief communities.

The Delegation of the Holy See would like to conclude by presenting the following recommendations:

- that the OSCE participating States, adhering to their consensually agreed decision of 2014, elaborate Ministerial Council Declarations on intolerance and discrimination on religious grounds;
- that the OSCE participating States devote one meeting of the Human Dimension Committee in 2018 to the concept and understanding of the freedom of religion or belief, in line with OSCE commitments;<sup>4</sup>
- that ODIHR continue its analysis and thinking concerning interreligious dialogue and dialogue between religious communities and governmental bodies, keeping in mind the differences between these two forms of dialogue.

Thank you, Mr. Moderator.

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<sup>3</sup> Vienna, 1989 (Questions Relating to Security in Europe: Principles).

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. Statement PC.SHDM.DEL/5/17, 23 June 2017.