



**THE HOLY SEE**  
**2015 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting**  
*Working Session 1: Fundamental Freedoms I. Freedom of expression*  
**Monday, September 21, 2015**

Mr. Moderator,

Freedom of expression doubtlessly numbers among the pillars on which all free and democratic societies must stand. My Delegation accordingly reiterates its support for freedom of expression as well as the free exchange of ideas, including particularly those related to religious belief and associated moral teachings. We also express support to those who engage in ensuring that this freedom is everywhere practised, respected and defended.

At the same time, freedom of expression, like other freedoms, has its limits and is not absolute. What goes beyond those limits may not be considered a freedom but rather a breach or misuse of freedom. There are undisputable examples, such as libel and insult, messages that seek to foster hatred and conflict among individuals and groups, mockery, obscenity and pornography and others, which are certainly abuses of freedom.

Even where one is able to do or say something, the purpose of freedoms cannot be to harm others and such acts should not be justified only because someone feels it is his or her right to do so. Hence, the exercise of freedom of expression should not disregard such things as truth, fairness, and respect for privacy, nor undermine the dignity of persons and the common good. In fact, these should be the guidelines for all freedoms.

This is also valid, and perhaps has even a greater weight, when it comes to freedom of expression exercised in and through the media. In this regard, we reiterate our support for the Ministerial Council decisions 13/06 and 10/07 which acknowledges “the recognition of the essential role that the free and independent media can play in democratic societies and the strong influence it can have in countering or exacerbating misperceptions and prejudices and in that sense continues to encourage the adoption of voluntary professional standards by journalists, media self-regulation and other appropriate mechanisms for ensuring increased professionalism, accuracy and adherence to ethical standards among journalists”.

Empowering the media by all means to foster an accurate reporting of events, full explanation of matters of public concern and fair representation of diverse points of view liberates the media industry from distortions and manipulative tendencies

which emerge when it becomes solely profit-driven and self-serving, losing all sense of accountability to the common good. Beyond being merely informative in society, media outlets are also formative and bear responsibility towards the common good, truth, goodness and beauty.

In his address to the Executive Directors and Employees of the Italian Radio-Television Network – RAI, His Holiness Pope Francis stated:

“In the end, the ethical quality of communication is the result of conscientious - not superficial - attention, always respectful of people, both those who are the subject of information and the recipients of the message. Each, in his own role and with his own responsibility, is called to be vigilant in maintaining a high level of ethics in communication” (*Address of Pope Francis to the Executive Directors and Employees of the Italian Radio-Television Network – RAI, 18 January 2014*).

Finally, it goes almost without saying that the Holy See deplors abuses of this freedom involving the public mocking of religions, their founders or leaders, communities or individuals which is often seen and defended as free expression. The regular humiliation of believers, in particular when it comes to what is most sacred to them, cannot be justified simply by the freedom of others to express themselves and we condemn it for what it is: deliberate mockery, provocation and denigration, acts before which we cannot remain silent. Appropriate measures should be undertaken to ensure that people of faith are not mercilessly and without consequences exposed to mockery or other attacks resulting from an irresponsible use of freedom of expression .

Thank you, Mr. Moderator!