



THE HOLY SEE
2014 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
Working Session 13: Tolerance and non-discrimination II:
Combating racism, xenophobia and discrimination,
also focusing on intolerance on religious grounds
Tuesday, September 30, 2014

Mr Moderator,

For the Holy See there is no doubt that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” and are united in one human family (cf. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, No. 1). The Church, by its nature, rejects racism in any form as a denial of the image of the Creator inherent in every human being. In order to achieve the genuine equality among people of different races or color, religions or beliefs, ethnicities or social origins and status concrete action is required at national and international level, to prevent and eliminate racism, xenophobia and unjust discrimination against any person. Above all, an extensive educational effort at all levels is needed, which exalts the dignity of the person and safeguards his or her fundamental rights aiming, at the same, at the conversion of hearts.

Mr Moderator,

The Holy See follows with deep concern and continues to raise its voice against the increase of anti-Semitism manifested in various ways throughout the OSCE region. Growing nationalistic movements targeting Jews and igniting hateful sentiments against them, justification of hate incidents against Jews through sentiments related to the State of Israel, verbal or physical attacks and worst of all murder are only some incidents that have been registered in recent times. My Delegation would like to recall what Second Vatican Council clearly affirmed, namely: the Catholic Church “deplores the hatred, persecutions, and displays of anti-Semitism directed against the Jews at any time and from any source” (*Nostra Aetate* n. 4). The combat against anti-Semitism means fighting for human rights and promoting peace. Therefore, the Holy See is profoundly and irrevocably committed to continue working in this direction because, as Pope Francis said, “it is a contradiction for a Christian to be anti-Semitic. His roots are a bit Jewish. A Christian cannot be an anti-Semite!” (*Address of Pope Francis to representatives of the Jewish community of Rome, Friday, 11 October 2013*).

The Holy See looks with sadness and anxiety on incidents of violence, intolerance and discrimination perpetrated against Muslim communities within the OSCE region. This phenomenon is often interrelated with racism, xenophobia and anti-immigrant sentiments. Such sentiments are at times encouraged by negative trends and anti-Muslim tendencies in the media and in political discourse, but also by various manifestations of Islam which consequently result into a generalization applied to all Muslims. Other elements that

contribute considerably to the climate of intolerance against Muslims are: identification of Muslims with terrorism, the global economic crisis, fears about national identity, stereotypes and prejudices about Muslims. All these can in no way justify acts of violence and bigotry which must be countered by all legal means.

Mr Moderator,

With the increase of religious intolerance in the world, it is well documented that year after year Christians are the religious group most persecuted and discriminated against. Even though the media do not give much attention to these worrying trends, and thus the problem seems smaller than in fact it is, it has been demonstrated through various researches and studies how Christians either have lost the protection of their societies or have experienced some government-imposed and unjust restrictions, or have become victims of violence resulting from an impulsive bigotry.

In spite of the commitments undertaken by member States of the OSCE in the area of religious freedom, including last year's Ministerial Council Decision, in some countries, including the OSCE region, intolerant and even discriminatory laws, decisions and behavior, either by action or omission, which deny this freedom, still exist or increase against the Church and Christian communities, and against other religious communities, as well as their members. In particular, there are illegitimate interferences in the area of their organizational autonomy, preventing them from acting consistently with their own moral convictions. At times undue pressure is brought to bear upon people working in public administration in contrast with their freedom to behave in accordance with the dictates of their own conscience. Educational programmes are deficient in duly respecting the identity and principles of Christians and of members of other religions, and there are clear signs of resistance to the recognition of religion's public role. The media and public discourse are not always free from attitudes of intolerance and, sometimes, of actual denigration of Christians and members of other religions. Perhaps on account of their engagement with society, through faith-based institutions to serve the common good through educational, social and medical services, as well as participating actively in public conversations to form societies more respectful of human life and dignity, Christians are frequently targets of prejudice and threats of violence. In the light of the above, the OSCE should devote specific attention and develop effective proposals to fight intolerance and discrimination against Christians. We are also looking forward to events in 2015 dedicated to this topic as promised by ODIHR earlier this year.

In conclusion let me underline that, as far as tolerance and non-discrimination is concerned, what is needed is the commitment of more focused energy and efforts to fulfill the agreed upon OSCE commitments which are indeed numerous and to resist the unilateral expansion of the same. Undue attention to other concerns that do not enjoy consensus among the participating States serves only to distract the efforts of the OSCE, as well as to forestall effective and timely measures to address the original commitments, many of which have yet to be implemented.

Thank you, Mr Moderator!