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**STATEMENT OF THE HOLY SEE
AS DELIVERED BY MSGR. MARINKO ANTOLOVIĆ
AT THE HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE ON
TOLERANCE AND NON-DISCRIMINATION
(INCLUDING HUMAN RIGHTS YOUTH EDUCATION)**

Tirana, Albania
21 – 22 May 2013

Plenary session 4: Combating intolerance and discrimination against Muslims

Mr. Chairman,

The Holy See continues to be concerned about 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 multiple appearances 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.

In spite of some considerable progress achieved in fostering interreligious as well as secular-religious dialogue and tolerance, including the latest Roundtable on this topic held in Vienna just a few weeks ago or the initiative known as “Courtyard of the Gentiles” started by His Holiness Pope emeritus Benedict XVI with the aim of creating a neutral space of encounter between believers and non-believers, there is still a lot to be done. This is why events such as this conference, which, *inter alia*, seeks to examine manifestations of intolerance and discrimination against Muslims and to contribute to the improvement of circumstances they live in, are important.

Mr. Chairman,

In order to positively change the current tensions related to intolerance targeting Muslims within the participating States of the OSCE, better mutual knowledge is indispensable. Hence, the Holy See recognizes the need for Christians, Muslims, Jews and members of other religions as well as those who do not profess any religion, to learn how to work together, as indeed they already do in many common undertakings. It also needs to be mentioned that respect and dialogue require reciprocity in all spheres, especially in that which concerns basic freedoms, and more particularly, religious freedom.

In this context let me share with the distinguished participants of this timely and highly important event, the words that His Holiness Pope Francis pronounced just two months ago in his address to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See:

It is not possible to build bridges between people while forgetting God. But the converse is also true: it is not possible to establish true links with God, while ignoring other people. Hence it is important to intensify dialogue among the various religions, and I am thinking particularly of dialogue with Islam. At the Mass marking the beginning of my ministry, I greatly appreciated the presence of so many civil and religious leaders from the Islamic world. And it is also important to intensify outreach to non-believers, so that the differences which divide and hurt us may never prevail, but rather the desire to build true links of friendship between all peoples, despite their diversity.

Mr. Chairman,

In conclusion, my Delegation wishes to reiterate its appreciation for the work of the OSCE/ODIHR in fighting intolerance and discrimination against Muslims. The commitment of this prominent international organization in this respect has been effective in raising awareness regarding the serious problem of such intolerance and incidents perpetrated against people of Islamic faith, their property and places of worship. We also commend the efforts of all those individuals or institutions, religious or civil, who in their own way contribute to the peaceful coexistence of various cultures and religions in our common OSCE region.

The Delegation of the Holy See is hopeful that, with more common efforts from all sides, intolerance and discrimination against Muslims and other religious communities in the OSCE region will diminish and eventually disappear from a community that seeks the common good and the good of all its members.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman!