



HOLY SEE

**Address of Monsignor Anthony R. Frontiero
Official of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace**

**2009 OSCE/ODIHR Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
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Working Session 7:

Tolerance and Non-Discrimination II: Prevention of Violence against Women
Thursday, 1 October 2009

Madam Moderator,

Gender-based violence perpetrated against women and girls continues unabated in all-too-many places and cultures. It takes a devastating toll on women's lives, on their families, and on society as a whole. Although most societies prohibit such violence, the reality is that it occurs too often, is frequently covered up, and is in many instances tacitly condoned.

Violence against women stems from perceptions, some long-ingrained, which basically devalue and objectify females and denies their human rights. In many societies, women cannot carry on the family name, are not considered important enough to educate, cannot inherit property and are seen as an economic drain if their family has to provide a dowry upon marriage. Recent statistics tell us that millions of girls are "missing" due to sex-selective abortions, infanticide and neglect. In some cultures, girls are exchanged for money and goods when offered as child brides, serving as a means of better economic security for their families. Treated as objects, women lack power, suffer low self esteem, and are denied education or employment opportunities

The OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality offers some hope in this regard, in that it outlines concrete recommendations to promote and protect women's rights in political, economic, civil, social, and educational fields, with a view to achieving social progress and better standards of life for women and men. While respecting the differences between men and women, it is the great challenge of our societies to defend the equal personal dignity of men and women. Ideally, policies should be designed that restore balance and fairness to social and political structures in such a way that their very success persuades all people to work towards the true advancement of women. Such progress, however, must take care to link women's freedom, dignity and equality to sound moral principles.

There is no doubt that we are often witnessing an ageing population, particularly within the OSCE region. Women still commonly live longer than men, but elderly women are sometimes shamefully overlooked by policy-makers and agencies that are created to look after women's concerns. It is critically important, therefore, to re-consider policies directed at elderly women, who have oftentimes cared for others in their adulthood, and who in justice should receive proper support in their turn.

Turning to migrants, in general, nearly half of those are female. It often happens that women

migrants become the principal source of income for their family. The most common employment opportunities for women, other than domestic work, consist in helping the elderly, caring for the sick and working in the hotel sector. These, too, are areas where just treatment must be assured for migrant women in recognition of and respect for their equal rights.

On a related matter, trafficking in human beings has a particularly negative impact on women. In some cases there are women and girls who are exploited like slaves in their work, and not infrequently in the sex industry. The culture which encourages the systematic exploitation of sexuality is as pervasive as it is unhealthy for society and must be addressed by more than fine words. The Holy See again condemns vigorously the sexual violence that frequently has women and girls for its object, and encourages the passing of laws that will effectively defend them from such violence. Nor can we fail, in the name of the respect due to the human person, to condemn the widespread culture which encourages the systematic exploitation of sexuality and corrupts even very young girls into letting their bodies be used for profit in a worldwide multi-billion dollar industry.

Madam Moderator, the Holy See is deeply concerned that women possess equal personal dignity alongside men since both are created in the image and likeness of God. The true dignity of women should be recognized, so that all women without exception will be enabled and empowered to play their vital role in the development and well being of their families, community, and society.

Thank you, Madam Moderator.