



PERMANENT MISSION OF THE HOLY SEE
TO THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY
AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

**STATEMENT BY MONSIGNOR MICHAEL W. BANACH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE HOLY SEE,
AT THE 808th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

6 MAY 2010

RE: SIXTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE END OF WORLD WAR II

Thank you, Mister Chairperson.

1. Sixty-five years ago, on 8 May 1945, the Second World War ended in Europe. The conclusion of that terrible calamity not only led people to hope for the return of the prisoners, deportees and refugees; it also awakened a desire to build a better Europe. The Continent could begin once more to hope in a future of peace and democracy. More than half a century later, individuals, families and peoples still retain memories of those six terrible years: memories of fear, violence, extreme poverty, death; tragic experiences of painful separation, endured in the absence of all security and freedom; recurring traumas brought about by the incessant bloodshed.

2. It was not easy at the time to comprehend fully the many tragic dimensions of the conflict. But the passage of time has brought an increased awareness of the effect of that event on the 20th century and on the future of the world. The Second World War was not only an historical event of the first order; it also marked a turning-point for humanity in our time. As the years go by, the memories of the War must not grow dim; rather, they ought to become a stern lesson for our generation and for generations yet to come.

What the War meant for Europe and for the world has come to be understood over the past five decades, thanks to new information which has made possible a better knowledge of the sufferings it caused. The tragic experience of the years 1939-1945 today represents a kind of point of reference

necessary for all who wish to reflect on the present and on the future of humanity.

3. It can never be sufficiently repeated that the Second World War changed the life of so many individuals and peoples for the worse. The point was reached where hellish death camps were built, where millions of Jews and hundreds of thousands of gypsies and other human beings met their death in atrocious conditions; their only fault was that they belonged to another people. Auschwitz, along with so many other concentration camps, remains the horribly eloquent symbol of the effects of totalitarianism. For totalitarianism destroys fundamental human freedoms and tramples upon human rights. Failure to understand that when freedoms are trampled on means that the foundations are laid for a dangerous decline into violence and hatred.

4. After 1945, wars unfortunately did not come to an end. Violence, terrorism and armed attacks have continued to darken these last decades. Today too many conflicts are still raging in different parts of the world. Public opinion, shaken by the horrible pictures which enter homes each day via television, reacts emotionally but all too quickly grows accustomed to these conflicts and comes to accept their inevitability. Besides being unjust, this attitude is extremely dangerous. We must never forget what happened in the past and what is still happening today. These are tragedies which affect countless innocent victims, whose cries of terror and suffering are a challenge to the consciences of all decent men and women. We cannot and must not yield to the logic of arms!

The Holy See, in addition to being a signatory of the major International Treaties and Conventions, has tirelessly sought to remind the international community of the urgent need to strengthen guidelines for disarmament, the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and for the elimination of chemical and biological weapons, especially those which are especially deadly and which strike indiscriminately. The Holy See has also invited public opinion to become more aware of the continuing phenomenon of the arms trade, a grave matter urgently calling for serious ethical reflection. Nor should it be overlooked that not only the militarization of States but also the easy access to arms enjoyed by private individuals or groups, which favours the spread of organized crime and terrorism, represents an unpredictable and constant threat to peace.

5. There must exist a connection between the memory of that terrible world conflict and the aims which should inspire national and international policies. In particular, it will be necessary to ensure effective means of controlling the international arms market and to make joint efforts to set up adequate structures for intervention in case of crises, in order to persuade all those involved to prefer negotiations to violent confrontation. In this, the OSCE has carved out a niche for itself.

6. Twenty years after the end of the Second World War, in 1965, Pope Paul VI, addressing the United Nations Organization, asked: “Will the world ever come to change the selfish and bellicose outlook that has spun out such a great part of its history up to now?”. In many respects, this question still awaits a response. May the memory of the Second World War rekindle in all — according to their possibilities — a resolve to work for a firm political commitment to peace in Europe and in the entire world.

Thank you, Mister Chairperson.