



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 905th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

15 MARCH 2012

**RE: REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE FOR
DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

Thank you, Mister Chairman.

1. The Delegation of the Holy See joins previous speakers in welcoming back to the Permanent Council the Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), Ambassador Janez Lenarčič, and thanks him for his detailed report outlining the most prominent issues that have occupied his Office during the last few months and providing an overview of planned activities for the current year. The emphasis on election observation missions and its related dialogue, as well as on fundamental rights and freedoms goes to the heart of the mandate of the ODIHR.

The Holy See has always followed with particular interest and attention the activities of the ODIHR and desires that they effectively contribute not only to the creation of a culture of the rule of law, but also to the promotion of human rights and democracy. This morning, rather than offer a *tour de horizon* of the activities of the ODIHR where the Holy See seeks to offer its own specific contribution, I will focus on two points.

2. First, human rights, of course, must include the right to religious freedom, understood as the expression of a dimension that is at once individual and communitarian – a vision that brings out the unity of the person while clearly distinguishing between the dimension of the citizen and that of the believer. The OSCE has always emphasized the positive contributions of religious communities to society. In this sense, the activity of the OSCE has ensured that public debate gives space to viewpoints inspired by a religious vision in all its dimensions, including ritual, worship, education, dissemination of information and the freedom to profess and choose religion. It is inconceivable, then, that believers should have to suppress a part of themselves, namely, their faith, in order to be active citizens. It should never be necessary to deny God in order to enjoy one's rights.

In this context, the Holy See has carefully listened to Ambassador Lenarčič's plans to reform the Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief. While recognizing that such a decision falls within the purview of the Director of the ODIHR, we would have preferred to see a greater consultation among the participating States on this issue and look forward to further consultation on this matter.

Nevertheless, the Holy See will continue to follow with interest the reform of the Panel and will provide candidates for its membership. The reform will need to insure that the freedom of religion remains firmly secured within fundamental freedoms, and does not become subsumed under the umbrella of tolerance, to which it is related. Ambassador Lenarčič himself observed this in his concluding remarks at the Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on Freedom of Religion or Belief, held in Vienna in December 2010. Furthermore, an eventual reformed Panel will need to hold fast to the OSCE's positive approach to religions, emphasizing their role in the public sphere and their contribution to democracy.

3. Secondly, in the area of tolerance and non-discrimination, the Holy See notes the recent efforts of the ODIHR in the area of the promotion of tolerance and non-discrimination where there is consensus among the participating States. There is no place in the modern world for anti-Semitism. To combat intolerance and discrimination against Muslims means that all of us must learn to work together. We need hold firm to a basic principle of this Organization that rejects the "*identification of terrorism with any nationality or religion*".

The Holy See continues to respond to ODIHR's questionnaire on "Hate Crimes in the OSCE Region: Incidents and Responses." The data presented in that response is collected on the basis of and in co-operation with the Apostolic Nunciatures in the OSCE region. Criminal incidents perpetrated on the basis of anti-religious bias and/or hatred towards Christians and members of other religions have been reported, investigated and/or prosecuted by local/national law enforcement agencies in several OSCE participating States. My Delegation looks forward to the publication of the 2011 Report, as well as to pursuing discussions with the ODIHR on what has emerged from this collection of data.

4. The topic of fundamental rights and freedoms leads me to state that, more in general, as far as the ODIHR's tolerance and non discrimination program is concerned, the Holy See counts itself among those participating States who desire to see a commitment of more focused energy and efforts to fulfil the clearly defined and agreed upon OSCE commitments. Giving the impression that there is a political consensus where there is not must be avoided. Any other approach will only serve to weaken our Organization by detracting attention from its core principles – equally valid in 2012, just as they were in 1975 and 1989. In fact, the question of focusing ever more our attention on core commitments becomes all the more urgent in this time of dwindling financial and economic resources.

5. In conclusion, Mister Chairman, I would like to assure the Director of the ODIHR of the co-operation of the Delegation of the Holy See and renew the wish for every success in continuing to carry out the mandate entrusted to him by the participating States.

Thank you, Mister Chairman!