



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

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ENGLISH only

**STATEMENT BY MONSIGNOR MICHAEL W. BANACH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE HOLY SEE,
AT THE 930th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

15 NOVEMBER 2012

**RE: REPORT BY THE PERSONAL REPRESENTATIVES OF THE
CHAIRMAN-IN-OFFICE ON COMBATING ANTI-SEMITISM; ON
COMBATING INTOLERANCE AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST
MUSLIMS; AND ON COMBATING RACISM, XENOPHOBIA AND
DISCRIMINATION, ALSO FOCUSING ON
INTOLERANCE AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST CHRISTIANS
AND MEMBERS OF OTHER RELIGIONS;**

Mister Chairperson,

1. The Holy See also joins other Delegations in welcoming the three Personal Representatives of the Chairman-in-Office and thanks them for their reports. Their presence at the Permanent Council testifies to the importance which the OSCE continues to attach to this issue. The question of the peaceableness of cultures, of peace and tolerance in matters of religion, has also moved up to become a political and security theme of the first rank.

2. There is no place in the modern world for anti-Semitism. This year, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the beginning of the Second Vatican Council, my Delegation would like to recall what that Council clearly affirmed, namely: the Catholic Church “*decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone*” (cf. *Nostra aetate*, no. 4). The Catholic Church has deepened and developed in the last fifty years the path of dialogue, fraternity and friendship with the Jewish community. The progress made in this important relationship is in no small part due to the work of the International Committee for Catholic-Jewish Relations and, in more recent years, by the Mixed Commission of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel and of the Holy See. In fact, the 11th meeting of this bilateral commission, held in Rome on March 27-29, 2012 - Nissan 4-6, 5772, was dedicated to the topic: “Religious perspectives on the current financial crisis: Vision for a just economic order”.

3. The Holy See continues to be concerned about incidents of violence, intolerance and discrimination perpetrated against Muslim communities within the OSCE region, and recognizes the need for Christians and Muslims to learn how to work together, as indeed they already do in many common undertakings, in order to guard against intolerance and to oppose manifestations of violence. Respect and dialogue require reciprocity in all spheres, especially in that which concerns basic freedoms, and more particularly, religious freedom.

In this sense, on the occasion of his September 2012 Visit to Lebanon, Pope Benedict XVI, speaking to a group of young Muslims and Christians, encouraged them to “*seek to build...together [so that] ...the Middle East in general, looking at you, should understand that Muslims and Christians, Islam and Christianity, can live side by side without hatred, with respect for the beliefs of each person, so as to build together a free and humane society*”. These words are also valid for the OSCE region.

4. A 2011 study on *Global Restrictions on Religion* by the Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion and Public Life revealed that seventy percent of the world’s population lives in countries with high restrictions on religious beliefs and practices. There is much consequent violence resulting from these restrictions, including murder, physical abuse, imprisonment, detention or displacement from one’s home, as well as damage to or destruction of personal or religious properties. On the increase are mob violence, religious-motivated terrorist groups and the commission of malicious acts by private citizens and groups motivated by religious hatred. In all of this, according to the study, Christians are the first target, especially in nations which place a great emphasis on tolerance. In his 2012 Address of the Members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, Pope Benedict XVI said: “*In many countries Christians are deprived of fundamental rights and sidelined from public life; in other countries they endure violent attacks against their churches and their homes. At times they are forced to leave the countries they have helped to build because of persistent tensions and policies which frequently relegate them to being second-class spectators of national life. In other parts of the world, we see policies aimed at marginalizing the role of religion in the life of society, as if it were a cause of intolerance rather than a valued contribution to education in respect for human dignity, justice and peace.*”

In spite of the commitments undertaken by member States of the OSCE in the area of religious freedom, in some countries intolerant and even discriminatory laws, decisions and behaviour, either by action or omission, which deny this freedom, still exist against the Church and Christian communities, and against other religious communities, as well as their respective 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. At times 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 against the recognition of religion's public role. Nor are the media and public discourse 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.

5. The Holy See will continue to follow the work of the three Personal Representatives in the promotion of tolerance and non-discrimination in the priority areas where the participating States have reached consensus: combating anti-Semitism; intolerance and discrimination against Muslims; Christians and members of other religions, and racism, xenophobia and related intolerance. In fact, my Delegation believes that the agreed commitments of the OSCE remain strong and noble, and are supported by a stable mandate and the principle of consensus. The Holy See reaffirms these commitments, and encourages this Organization to remain focused on them, so as to guarantee the effectiveness and efficiency of the OSCE into the future.

6. In conclusion, my Delegation wishes all the best to the three Personal Representatives of the Chairman-in-Office. In the exercise of their mandate they may yet be of help in the struggle for what concerns us all.

Thank you, Mister Chairperson.