



THE HOLY SEE
2011 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
Working Session 3: Fundamental Freedoms II.
Human rights education
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Mr. Chairman,

1. Through the work of the OSCE/ODIHR, greater solidarity at the international level is seen especially in the ongoing promotion — even in the midst of economic crisis — of *greater access to education*, which is at the same time an essential precondition for effective international cooperation, peace, and security. The Holy See would like to recall that the term “education” refers not only to classroom teaching and vocational training — both of which are important factors in development — but to the complete formation of the person. In this regard, there is a problem that should be highlighted: in order to educate, it is necessary to know the nature of the human person, to know who he or she is. The increasing prominence of a relativistic understanding of that nature presents serious problems for education, especially moral education, jeopardizing its universal extension. Yielding to this kind of relativism makes everyone poorer and has a negative impact on the effectiveness of aid to the most needy populations, who lack not only economic and technical means, but also educational methods and resources to assist people in realizing their full human potential (cf. Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, no. 61).

2. For the Holy See, relativistic notions of what it means to be a person offer insufficient justification and defense of human rights; because if rights are absolute, how can they be founded on a notion that is merely relative? Human rights, therefore, must be grounded in the objective requirements of human nature. Otherwise, in some cases the human person is marked by a permanent dignity, and rights that are always and everywhere valid; in other cases a person may not have a permanent dignity, and negotiable rights. This state of affairs is what we witness everyday in acts of intolerance and discrimination. Without a clear and strong awareness of who we are as persons, it will always be easier to claim that some people are worthy of respect and others are not; some people have the right to life, liberty, and religious belief, and others do not.

3. In this regard, the Holy See would like to recall that, in the work of education and awareness, the family forms persons in the fullness of their dignity according to all their dimensions, including the social dimension. The family, in fact, constitutes a community of love and solidarity which is uniquely suited to teach and transmit cultural, ethical, social, spiritual and religious values essential for the

development and well-being of its own members and of society. By exercising its mission to educate, the family contributes to the common good and constitutes the first school of social virtue, which all societies need. In the family, persons are helped to grow in freedom and responsibility, indispensable prerequisites for any function in society. With education, certain fundamental values are communicated and assimilated. That is why the family has a completely original and irreplaceable role in raising children. Parents have the duty and right to impart a religious education and moral formation to their children, a right the State cannot annul but which it must respect and promote. This is a primary right that the family may not neglect or delegate, yet must at the same time exercise with responsibility in close and vigilant cooperation with civil and ecclesial agencies, since both are necessary for an integral education directed toward the formation of people educated in dialogue, encounter, sociality, legality, solidarity and peace, through the cultivation of the fundamental virtues of justice and charity (cf. *Compendium of the Social Teaching of the Church*, nos. 238-242).

4. The Holy See is pleased to recall, as well, that through its vast network of schools, universities and institutions throughout the world, the Catholic Church endeavors to foster and support such cooperation in the education and formation of people of all ages, assisting them in developing an awareness of their personal values and to clarify conflicting values and ethical dilemmas. Catholic social teaching, which is increasingly and effectively being integrated in to academic curricula as well as pastoral practice, assists in the formation of a developed sense of values, ethics, and a moral conscience for social justice. It embraces a rich heritage that places people at the center of social concerns, recognizes the dignity of the human person and the interdependence of humanity. It challenges the oppression of racism, and works for social and economic justice, and it insists that all people of good will defend human rights, participate in society at all levels, and take action to serve the poor and vulnerable.

This teaching is put into action as Catholic institutions of education and formation strive to provide opportunities to disadvantaged populations, and emphasize the importance of establishing services needed to meet basic human needs, which support the development of human capacities and enhance the social functioning of individuals and families. Catholic education seeks to cultivate an environment that exemplifies the Church's call to understand and support family and to participate in and contribute to the broader society.

5. The agreed commitments of the OSCE are strong and noble, and are supported by a stable mandate and the principle of consensus. The Holy See reaffirms these commitments, and encourages this distinguished body, and in particular the ODIHR in its publications and other initiatives, to remain focused on them, so as to guarantee the effectiveness and efficiency of the OSCE into the future.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.