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STATEMENT OF THE HOLY SEE

TO THE

OSCE CONFERENCE ON COMBATING DISCRIMINATION AND PROMOTING MUTUAL RESPECT AND UNDERSTANDING

*Session 3: Combating Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination,
also Focusing on Intolerance and Discrimination Against Christians
and Members of Other Religions,
Session 3*

by

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for the Promotion of Christian Unity**

Bucarest, 8 June 2007

Madame Moderator,

The problems discussed in the present session do not affect only individual Christians, but religious confessions as such. They affect not only minority religious groups but majority ones as well. It is simplistic to impute systematically to majority religions the weak protection or lack of protection afforded by State authorities to other religious communities. Likewise it is to be noted that the threats against religious identity are present both to the East and West of Vienna, even when they take on varying forms and differing grades of intensity in accordance with time and place and circumstances.

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 Churches and Christian communities, and against other religious communities, as well as their respective members. There are recurring episodes of violence and even killings against Christian believers, as recently happened in Turkey with the brutal murder of three Christians. Undue restrictions remain against the registration of Churches and religious communities, as well as against the importation and distribution of their religious materials. There are also illegitimate interferences in the area of their organizational autonomy, preventing them from acting consistently with their own moral convictions. In 2004, officials from the Evangelical Fellowship and the Catholic Church met Administrative officials of an OSCE participating State, in order to discuss the guidelines for charities in relation to political activities. In contravention of the fundamental freedom to manifest one's religion through teaching, practice and observance, the Religious representatives were told that their respective Church and religious communities should not speak out on some fundamental moral issues, during the election campaign.

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. In one OSCE country provincial marriage commissioners were instructed to perform same-sex marriage ceremonies or else resign their posts. Some commissioners resigned; others filed a complaint, since they felt that their right to freedom of conscience and religious freedom had been violated.

2. At times civic education is 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. And yet the traditional engagement of the OSCE in favour of religious freedom springs from the precise conviction that such a freedom is a fundamental dimension of the human person and not something related only to the private sphere of individuals; it benefits the social fabric and has security implications because of its public dimension. The specific contribution of Christians to the construction and well-

being of our democratic systems is an added valued for society, and the acknowledgment of this contribution is a guarantee and an expression of true pluralism. The distinction between spiritual and civil realities does not in fact entail estrangement, indifference and incommunicability, but dialogue and interaction at the service of the authentic good of the human person. Pope Benedict XVI has repeatedly pointed out that secularity is not secularism. Consequently, if religious communities dissent from legislative measures or administrative decisions, or propose alternative initiatives, this should not be considered *ipso facto* as a form of intolerance. Vice versa it would be intolerant to seek to prevent these communities from acting in this way or denigrate them just because they propose different options. Ethical relativism - which holds nothing as definitive - cannot be considered a condition for democracy, as if by itself it could guarantee tolerance and mutual respect among persons and allegiance to majority decisions. A healthy democracy promotes the dignity of every human person and respect for his or her inviolable and inalienable rights. Without an objective moral anchorage, not even democracy can ensure a stable peace (cf. *Evangelium vitae*, No. 70).

3. 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. Effective pluralism in the media requires correct information on religious realities, the guarantee of access to the media for religious communities and the banishment of *hate speech* against Christians and members of other religions. With full respect for freedom of expression and in the context of the legislative and juridical system of each country, mechanisms and tools against manipulation of the messages of religious communities and the disrespectful presentation of their members should be prepared. Last year, a famous rock star appeared in her concert tour wearing a false crown of thorns and organized a controversial mock crucifixion in her stage show.

Some time before in the web site of a well-known pro-choice organization, an animated feature video showed the organization's 'superhero' drowning an abstinence educator in a trash can and killing peaceful Christian pro-life activists by blowing them up in front of a facility of that organization. In the video, a pro-life supporter was mercilessly decapitated.

Madame Moderator,

In the light of the above-mentioned abuses, the OSCE should devote specific attention and develop effective proposals to fight intolerance and discrimination against Christians. The CiO Personal Representative on Combating Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination, also Focusing on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians and Members of Other Religions should be a key player in carefully monitoring and reporting these persistent problems. These are core aspects of the mandate of this Representative, as it was made clear in the negotiations that brought about this institution.

Thank you, Madame Moderator