



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 800th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

25 MARCH 2010

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

Thank you, Mister Chairperson.

1. The Delegation of the Holy See willingly joins the previous speakers in warmly 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. As such it is very much welcome.

Mister Chairman:

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.

2. Human trafficking is fundamentally a human rights problem that requires an equally multi-dimensional response of prevention, education and awareness, assistance to victims, and professional development. The Holy See

remains deeply concerned about this problem in the human family and is pleased to note the recent continuing efforts of the ODIHR in this regard. The *OSCE Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings* is a hopeful manifestation of the strong commitment on the part of the participating States to put an end to the scourge of trafficking in persons. There have been many concrete initiatives taken to stem this horrific activity. Such initiatives include education and awareness campaigns, legislation aimed prosecuting traffickers, and the implementation of more effective mechanisms for international cooperation in fighting this tragic human problem. The Delegation of the Holy See commends all these valiant efforts, including by many religious organizations, that have made it a priority to offer safe havens, healing centres and places of care for the victims of trafficking. At the same time, my Delegation would like to draw attention to the desperate need for the human family to face squarely the demand side of the problem of trafficking in persons.

3. My Delegation notes that continuing discussions on the *Handbook on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of the Armed Forces* will also include a focus on freedom of religion. The promotion of human rights means putting people first, and putting people first means giving attention to the soldier's religious formation, guiding him or her and his or her family in the process of religious formation, and in the development of his vocation and of his faith. True religion emphasizes the fundamental importance of the value of peace. The Holy See believes that those doing military service must be considered as ministers of the security and freedom of peoples, because, if they carry out their duties properly, they also truly contribute to peace and stability.

4. Regarding the ODIHR's work with the Venice Commission in order to update the *Guidelines on Reviewing Legislation Pertaining to Freedom of Religion or Belief*, the Holy See is confident that churches and religious communities will be involved in the process and appropriately consulted. They have a wealth of experience to offer and can provide unique and valuable perspectives from the ground.

5. In the area of tolerance and non-discrimination, the Holy See is equally pleased to note the recent efforts of the ODIHR in the area of the promotion of tolerance and non-discrimination in the "religious" sphere. There is no place in the modern world for anti-Semitism. It is important to remember the countless victims of blind racial and religious hatred who suffered deportation, imprisonment and death in those perverted and inhuman places. To teach the memory of those deeds, especially the *Shoah* which afflicted the Jewish people,

calls forth an ever deeper respect for the dignity of every person, so that such tragedies may never be repeated.

To combat intolerance and discrimination against Muslims means that all of us must learn to work together. In particular, religious authorities and political leaders must guide and encourage their followers and constituents in this direction. The Catholic Church also deplores that crimes have been committed which offend God and humanity and throw discredit on Islam. We should hold firm to a basic principle of this Organization that rejects the *“identification of terrorism with any nationality or religion”*.

The Holy See responded to the the ODIHR questionnaire on “Hate Crimes in the OSCE Region: Incidents and Responses.” The data presented in that response was 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 this data, as well as to pursuing discussions with the ODIHR on what has emerged from this collection of data.

6. My Delegation notes with satisfaction the efforts of the ODIHR to promote respect for the human rights of the Roma and Sinti people. Education is a fundamental and indispensable condition for development. While in the past the predominately wandering life of Roma and Sinti made systematic schooling of youngsters difficult, today the obstacles to be overcome are more related to the type of education given. Joint initiatives by governments, Roma and Sinti associations, and also churches could help to ensure that education is provided to Roma and Sinti children. Likewise, it is necessary to consider all the aspects of development that Roma and Sinti people should benefit from, such as professional training for young people, access to healthcare, decent housing conditions and social security.

7. In conclusion, Mister Chair, 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 Chair!