



THE HOLY SEE

2012 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

*Working Session 14: Tolerance and non-discrimination II:
Review of the implementation of commitments on promotion of
mutual respect and understanding*

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National Point of Contact of the Holy See for 'Hate Crime'

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Mister Chairperson,

1. The commitment of the Catholic Church to combating religious intolerance and discrimination is well known.

2. There is no place in the modern world for anti-Semitism. The Catholic Church has irrevocably committed itself to pursue the path of dialogue, fraternity and friendship between the Catholic community and our Jewish brothers and sisters, a journey which has been deepened and developed in the last forty years, through important steps and significant gestures. 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, which have worked together in discovering anew a common spiritual patrimony, to keep open the space for dialogue, for reciprocal respect, for growth in friendship, and for a common witness in the face of the challenges of our time, which invite us to cooperate for the good of humanity.

3. The Holy See continues to be concerned about incidents of violence, intolerance and discrimination perpetrated against Muslim communities within the OSCE region. The Holy See 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 and calls upon religious authorities and political leaders alike to guide and encourage these religious groups in this direction.

4. With the increase of religious intolerance in the world, it is well documented that Christians are the religious group most discriminated against as there may well be more than 200 million of them, of different confessions, who are in situations of difficulty because of legal and cultural structures that lead to their discrimination. Recent trends have seen a marginalization of religion, particularly of Christianity, even 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.”

The Holy See is convinced that the international community must fight intolerance and discrimination against Christians with the same determination as it would fight hatred against members of other religious communities. The right to religious freedom includes the right to practice one’s religion in the public sphere; and the right to practice one’s religion in the public sphere ensures a place for the Christian voice and perspectives on current political, social and moral issues. Anything to the contrary is simply contrary to the democratic spirit. Participating States of the OSCE have committed themselves fight against discrimination and intolerance against Christians. What came out clearly from the Round Table discussion in March 2009 in Vienna and from the 2011 Rome Meeting on Preventing and Responding to Hate Crimes against Christians is that intolerance and discrimination against Christians is manifested in various forms across the OSCE area.

5. Participating States of the OSCE have committed themselves fight against discrimination and intolerance against Christians. Reported examples of hate crimes against Christians can be found in the recent Hate Crimes reports of the ODIHR, including the one for 2011. The Holy See would like to encourage all OSCE participating States to dedicate more attention to hate crimes against Christians, as well as to collect statistics on these crimes and to send them to the ODIHR.

6. 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. There are recurring episodes of violence and even killings against Christian believers. 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. 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 civic education is deficient in duly respecting the identity and principles of Christians and of members of other religions and, as mentioned above, 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.

7. In the light of the above-mentioned abuses, the Holy See would like to repeat its recommendation that an International Day against Discrimination of Christians be instituted and that the ODIHR become the chief promoter of such an initiative.

8. In conclusion, Mister Chairperson, the Holy See would like to reiterate its conviction of the importance that the institution of the three Personal Representatives brings to 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 encouraging all OSCE institutions to remain within the boundaries of these consensual commitments – an important attitude in this time of reduced financial resources – the Holy See expresses its appreciation for the balanced work of the three Representatives who have dedicated attention to the core aspects of their mandates in the spirit of the negotiations that brought about their institution.

Thank you, Mister Chairperson!