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**STATEMENT OF THE HOLY SEE
AS DELIVERED BY MSGR. MARINKO ANTOLOVIĆ
AT THE HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE ON
TOLERANCE AND NON-DISCRIMINATION
(INCLUDING HUMAN RIGHTS YOUTH EDUCATION)**

Tirana, Albania
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**Plenary session 1: Combating intolerance and discrimination, including racism,
xenophobia and aggressive nationalism, in accordance within the existing OSCE
commitments**

Mr. Chairman,

The fight against racial discrimination and xenophobia is, above all, about how we wish to structure the interaction of individuals and peoples. Racism is a sin and assault on human inherent dignity that each one of us is given in an equal manner. It is fundamentally a lie, a concept deliberately invented to create division in humanity. Our deliberations must be about the truth: the truth concerning human dignity, the truth concerning the fundamental unity of the human family.

Despite this contemporary period of unprecedented humanitarian and scientific progress, all too many dimensions of our world community are still marked by exclusion, division and crass inequality, with consequent dramatic human suffering. Nor can we forget that the recent past has witnessed actions aimed not only at exclusion but at the very extermination of entire peoples. The challenge of our generation is to ensure that this will never happen again.

The phenomenon of racism and xenophobia are sadly still widespread, especially in countries with high rates of immigration. This can be observed among the inhabitants of these countries with regard to foreigners, especially when the latter differ in their race, ethnic origin or religion. The prejudices which these immigrants frequently encounter risk setting into motion reactions which can find their first manifestation in an exaggerated nationalism which goes beyond legitimate pride in one's own country or even superficial chauvinism. Such reactions can subsequently degenerate into xenophobia or even racial hatred.

These reprehensible attitudes have often their origin in the irrational fear which the presence of others and confrontation with differences can often provoke. Such attitudes

have as their goal, whether acknowledged or not, the denial of the other's right to be what he or she is and, in any case, to be "in our country." Of course, there can be problems of maintaining a balance between peoples, cultural identity and security. These problems, however, must be solved with respect for others and confidence in the enrichment that comes from human diversity. On the other hand, the ostracism and the harassment of which refugees and immigrants are too often the object are deplorable.

One of the best ways to raise awareness in fighting racism and xenophobia is to have the courage to begin to touch the most central and the deepest dimensions of what is needed to fight racial discrimination and to build a more just world. Each of us, as individuals and as representatives of nations and peoples, is invited to examine the sentiments that are in our own hearts. Without an individual and collective conversion of heart and attitude, the roots of hatred will not be eliminated, and racism and xenophobia will continue to raise their ugly head again and again.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me illustrate it with an example, or rather a person that has influenced and changed so many lives. If we all could adopt and imitate such an exemplary acceptance of others, the world would certainly be a different, better place.

Her name was Anjezë Gonxhe Bojaxhiu. A little girl, the youngest of the children of Nikollë and Dranfile Bojaxhiu. Later on she became famous, the whole world knew her name. The only reason for her popularity was her love for others, all those who were in need of pure, altruistic human love that is nurtured by love of God. Her original name might have been unknown to some or forgotten by others, but her other name will never be forgotten – it is Mother Teresa.

All the sick, abandoned, despised and if you wish discriminated, in her eyes became Jesus, her greatest love. The love she had for her God she shared with those who received hate or contempt from others. What was needed, for Mother Teresa, was a sincere change of heart. If we only could, as she was able to, recognize sacredness in each other, no racism, xenophobia, nationalism, negation of human rights and fundamental freedoms, intolerance or discrimination would ever have a place in our world.

It is not an easy process. It requires that we examine the reality of history, not in order to be trapped in the past, but to be able to begin honestly to construct a different future. The late Pope John Paul II noted: "One cannot remain a prisoner of the past: individuals and peoples need a sort of 'healing of memories'" (Message for World Day of Peace, 1997). The healing of memory requires that we honestly appraise our personal, community and national history and admit those less noble aspects which have contributed to the marginalization of today, but in such a way as to reinforce our desire to make the era of globalisation an era of encounter, inclusion and solidarity.

Thank you, Mister Chairman!