



THE HOLY SEE

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Statement of the Most Reverend Antonio Cañizares
Archbishop of Toledo
Head of the Delegation of the Holy See
to the OSCE Conference on
Anti-Semitism and Other Forms of Intolerance
Cordoba, 8 June 2005

Session 5:

*The struggle against intolerance and discrimination
against Christians and members of other religions:
respect for religious identity in a pluralist society*

Madame Moderator,

1. After the Ministerial Council of Sofia, the Holy See felt an even more pressing need to engage in a careful and objective examination of the nature and forms of discrimination and intolerance against Christians and against members of other religions. This task is, inter alia, in line with her traditional and recognised commitment also to give a voice in the OSCE to the concerns of believers of other religious confessions.

Accordingly it has emerged that the problems discussed in the present session do not affect individual Christians, but religious confessions as such; they not only damage minority religious groups but majority ones also. It has become clear that 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 has become evident 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.

2. In spite of the commitments pledged 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 subsist against Churches and Christian communities, and against other religious communities, as well as their respective believers. Undue restrictions remain against the registration of these Churches and communities, against the importation and distribution of their religious material. Sometimes unjustified delays are involved, even refusals, in handing back their confiscated property which has on occasions been given over to persons who are not the legal owners. There are 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 those who work in Public Administration in contrast with their freedom to behave in accordance with the dictates of their own conscience.

It sometimes happens that, in the presence of a majority religion, civil authorities do not recognise the juridic personality of Churches or minority religious communities and these are subjected to limitations in their internal life as regards the formation of clergy, the acquisition of property, etc.

At times civic education is deficient in due respect for the identity and principles of Christians and of those 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. Pope John Paul II, at the beginning of the year 2004 recalled this theme in his address to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See. On that occasion the Pontiff stated: *everyone may agree to respect the religious sentiment of individuals but the same cannot be said of (...) the social dimension of religions; here the engagements made in what was formerly known as the "Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe" have been forgotten.*

Madame Moderator,

3. It is well known that Christianity is the majority religion of many countries of the OSCE; indeed it has marked the history, identity, culture and social life of their people. 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 power does not in fact entail estrangement, indifference and incommunicability, but dialogue and sharing at the service of the authentic good of the human person. *Secularity is not secularism*, Pope John Paul II pointed out in the aforementioned address. He went on to say that the secular State *assures the free exercise of ritual, spiritual, cultural and charitable activities by communities of believers.*

In a pluralistic society, secularity is a place for communication between the different spiritual traditions and the nation.

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, unless these communities- instead of proposing - impose their convictions and exercise pressure on the conscience of others. Vice versa it would be intolerant to seek to prevent these communities from acting in the way described above or denigrate them just because they do not agree with options that are contrary to human dignity.

Ethic 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).

4. Nor are the media always free from attitudes of intolerance and, not infrequently, of denigration in relation to Christians and members of other religions. Effective pluralism in the media requires correct information on religious realities, guarantees 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 coherence with 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.

The Holy See is consequently hopeful that the Conference of Cordoba will be a favorable occasion for the OSCE to commit itself to establish effective tools and mechanisms to fight against prejudices and misrepresentations of Christians and members of other religions in the media and through education. The Holy See wishes also that the Cordoba Conference will engage the OSCE to promote the effective contribution of Churches and religious communities to the public life of States, guaranteeing their specific identity and recognising their fundamental contribution to the construction of a society at the service of the human person.

Thank you, Madame Moderator.