



THE HOLY SEE

2016 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

Working Session 14: Tolerance and non-discrimination II – ensuring equal opportunity for women and men in all spheres in life, the implementation of the OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality

Wednesday, 28 September 2016

Mr/Mme Moderator,

Pope Francis, in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, “On love in the family – *Amoris Lætitia*” has noted the significant advances that have been made in the recognition of women’s human rights and their participation in public life. He underlined, however, the progress still needed in this regard and, in particular, pointed out “the shameful ill-treatment to which women are sometimes subjected” like “domestic violence and various forms of enslavement,” as well as “their lack of equal access to dignified work and roles of decision-making.”¹ That violence against women continues to be a widespread phenomenon and one that impacts the lives of so many women remains a shameful reality in all societies.

Moreover, Pope Francis insisted that “[h]istory is burdened by the excesses of patriarchal cultures that considered women inferior, yet in our own day, we cannot overlook the use of surrogate mothers and ‘the exploitation and commercialization of the female body in the current media culture’.

The Holy See recognizes the very valuable role of women in the context of conflicts, primarily as agents and important contributors to their prevention and resolution. In particular, our Delegation is convinced that there is ample room for a greater involvement of women, especially in view of the prevention of war, for the reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction of societies in post-war situations, and for avoiding relapses into armed conflicts.

While “the equal dignity of men and women makes us rejoice to see old forms of discrimination disappear,”² the search for an authentic and true equality between men and women still constitutes a matter of concrete, practical, everyday issues. Saint John Paul II spelled this out clearly, stating that there is “an urgent need to achieve *real equality* in every area: equal pay for equal work, protection for working mothers, fairness in career advancements, equality of spouses with regard to family rights and the recognition of everything that is

¹ Pope Francis, *Amoris Lætitia*, n. 54.

² Ibid.

part of the rights and duties of citizens in a democratic State” (John Paul II, 1995, *Letter to women*).

Because of this conviction, the Holy See fully supports the political, economic, social and cultural participation of women – alongside, and on the same level as men – in accordance with OSCE agreed commitments, especially with the 2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality, to which it joined its consensus as it represents a solid guide for how our Organization may advance the “full and true equality between men and women [as] a fundamental aspect of a just and democratic society based on the rule of law”³.

In this regard, the Holy See would welcome a consideration on what the OSCE as a Regional Security Organization needs at this particular time: more commitments on the equality between men and women, or renewed and intensified focus on the full implementation of existing agreed commitments, found as they are in the 2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality, as well as in the 2014 Decision on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women. Such a consideration was also voiced during the recent Chairmanship event on violence against women, held at the Hofburg on 22 July last. The drawn-out negotiations on the Addendum of the 2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality, even today at a standstill, should therefore be reconsidered, as insistence on the need for such an Addendum lends itself to the impression that the 2004 OSCE Action Plan has been implemented in full, an impression that is simply not true.

The Holy See has repeatedly cautioned against using the plight suffered by many women and the obvious lack of progress in implementing the 2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality to push for the introduction of extraneous issues in the OSCE or to attempt to give new interpretations to agreed commitments to the general accepted understanding of terminology. It is not to the Organization’s credit that the Holy See’s calls for caution in this regard have sometimes been met with ridicule. However, it does unmask the lack of real interest in actually helping women in our region and beyond, in advancing the political, economic, social and cultural participation of women, alongside, and on the same level as men, as well as in addressing the issue of discrimination with regard to sex.

Due to this state of affairs, two points should be reiterated here: first, the Holy See simply cannot support approaches that, while claiming to seek equality and non-discrimination, eliminate the distinctions based on sex, and fail to respect and appreciate fully the inherent dignity and the integrity of the human person. Ideologies that attempt to erase the distinction of man and woman to arrive at a so-called “non-gender common denominator” ultimately diminish the

³ Document of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE (Moscow, 3 October 1991), Principle 40.

value of both the female and the male. Such an approach wrongly pursues a notion of human rights that eliminates the specificity of man and woman, excluding their equality and their complementarity.

As Pope Francis has remarked: “Modern contemporary culture has opened new spaces, new forms of freedom and new depths in order to enrich the understanding of this difference [between man and woman]. But it has also introduced many doubts and much scepticism. For example, I ask myself if the so-called gender theory is not, at the same time, an expression of frustration and resignation, which seeks to cancel out sexual difference because it no longer knows how to confront it. (...) The removal of difference in fact creates a problem, not a solution.”

Second, the Holy See cannot accept a denial of the objective and unchangeable difference between male and female as creatures of God. Such an identity is not subject to cultural changes or interpretations and cannot be socially constructed. It is, instead, fixed by nature – the creation of God.⁴ Dubious interpretations based on views which assert that sexual identity can be adapted indefinitely to suit new and different purposes cannot be accepted. The inclusion of terms “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” in the important work of advancing equality between men and women is simply counter-productive.

At the same time, the Holy See remains optimistic that the international community will continue to strive to promote the human rights of women with an approach that is truly worthy and deserving of the human person.

Thank you, Mr/Mme Moderator.

⁴ Cfr. Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, n. 56: “Yet another challenge is posed by the various forms of an ideology of gender that ‘denies the difference and reciprocity in nature of a man and a woman and envisages a society without sexual differences, thereby eliminating the **anthropological basis** of the family. This ideology leads to educational programmes and legislative enactments that promote a personal identity and emotional intimacy radically separated from the biological difference between male and female. Consequently, human identity becomes the choice of the individual, one which can also change over time’. It is a source of concern that some ideologies of this sort, which seek to respond to what are at times understandable aspirations, manage to assert themselves as absolute and unquestionable, even dictating how children should be raised. It needs to be emphasized that ‘biological sex and the socio-cultural role of sex (gender) can be distinguished but not separated’”.