



STATEMENT OF THE HOLY SEE

2019 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

Opening plenary session

Monday, 16 September 2019

Madam Chair,

The Holy See is pleased to take part in this 2019 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM), and thanks Poland, our host country, for its hospitality, as well as the Slovak OSCE Chairmanship and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), for planning and organizing this meeting.

The HDIM is a central component of the OSCE structure, as it allows all 57 participating States not only to take stock of, but also to confirm, our common course towards a region *second to none* in its respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Therefore, my Delegation considers it crucial that the HDIM remains among the consensus-based OSCE meetings and expresses its satisfaction with the approval by the Permanent Council of the entire agenda of this HDIM, in accordance with the relevant OSCE decisions. However, it is hoped that the very late adoption of the HDIM decisions will not become a precedent for the coming years. My Delegation also finds it concerning that the annotated agenda was distributed very late. Since participating States need sufficient time to study and prepare for the items on the agenda, which presents OSCE commitments, proposes commitment-based questions and thus guides the discussions, it would be preferable that it be made available, as much as possible, in advance of the working sessions. Doing so would facilitate the work and the engagement of the participating States.

At the beginning of this meeting, the Holy See wishes to underline again that the “universality of human rights represents a crucial question for our age, a real topic *stantis aut cadentis*, the answer to which will determine whether human rights continue to mark the common horizon for the construction of our societies, the necessary point of reference for the exercise of political power and a guide for the path to be followed by the international community”.¹ Two developments, in particular, are of concern in this regard.

First, as Pope Francis noted in his address to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See last year, “... the interpretation of some rights has progressively changed, with the inclusion of a number of ‘new rights’ that not infrequently conflict with one another”.² A wide array of interpretations of certain rights and the affirmation of “new rights” may create more obstacles to universal consensus rather than facilitate it. In this regard, it is crucial that participating States seek a more unified concept of what ‘a human right’ signifies, thereby

¹ Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher, *Intervention at the Council of Europe for the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man*, 10 September 2018.

² Pope Francis, *Address to the members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See*, 8 January 2018.

avoiding that the human dimension continue to fall ever further behind the first and the second dimensions.

Second, the universality of human rights is based on the idea that all universal human rights and fundamental freedoms must be protected and promoted. This universality is at risk when some human rights are ignored, when a hierarchy among human rights is established, or when an inadequate approach to ‘rights’ conditions the very respect for human rights. While all Delegations and civil society organizations express a desire for the increased protection and advancement of human rights and fundamental freedoms, at times this is accompanied by biased approaches to universal human rights and fundamental freedoms that seek to advance issues on which there is no consensus among participating States thus falling outside the scope of the meeting.

One possible way forward is the following: that the 57 OSCE participating States unite around a common understanding of OSCE commitments in the “third basket” and on the universal principles of human rights and fundamental freedoms that underpin the human dimension. The Holy See has often expressed its concern about the consequences of those approaches that tend to remove rights from their proper context, that restrict the range of their application or that permit the meaning and interpretation of them to vary and their universality to be denied. Such approaches, not unlike the one that considers human rights and fundamental freedoms as privileges granted by the State (which could be subsequently overturned whenever the authority pleases), tends to create “categories” of rights and rights-holders, which undercuts the very idea of the “universality” of human rights. To this end, it is important that the term “human right” be exactly and prudently applied so that it does not become a rhetorical catch-all that is endlessly expanded to suit the passing whims of the age. To the proper understanding of ‘human rights’, the Holy See lends its moral support and thereby encourages the participating States to make human rights and fundamental freedoms a reality for all.

In this regard, it may be useful to recall that the work of the HDIM is essentially that of discussing the implementation of the OSCE human dimension commitments consensually adopted, many of which still need to be fully implemented, rather than on expanding them. This element, along with acknowledging the specific nature of the OSCE as a regional security arrangement, will help to avoid the dilution of OSCE programs and projects and the unnecessary duplication of activities of other organizations. At the same time, it should be noted that the utilization of the concept of “interpretation” as a strategy for making substantial amendments, and overruling or transforming existing OSCE commitments is in contrast with the *bona fide* principle and the Rules of Procedure of the Organization.

The participation of civil society at HDIM is valuable and needed. The knowledge, information and feed-back that come from this participation not only adds to HDIM as Europe’s largest meeting on human rights, but provides the participating States with assistance and support for their implementation of OSCE human dimension commitments. This auxiliary role of civil society – assisting participating States, also through criticism, in the States’ implementation of commitments – should be further strengthened through greater efforts to draw civil society actors with topic-specific expertise and experience to take part in human dimension events.

On the structure of HDIM’s working sessions, my Delegation would like to see further consultations among participating States. Unfortunately, with the large number of interventions during the working sessions, the time allowed to Delegations to make their statements is so brief that it makes it challenging to present carefully considered arguments

on human dimension commitments and their implementation. Perhaps one solution could be to limit the time for the introductory remarks so as to permit more time for the Delegations³.

In conclusion, while wishing all organizers and participants at this 2019 HDIM fruitful discussions and assuring everyone of the Holy See's constructive engagement during the next two weeks, my Delegation hopes that these few considerations will be helpful in our common work.

Thank you, Madam Chair!

³ In this regard the general guidelines provided for OSCE meetings (PC.DEC/762) suggest that there should be no more than two keynote speakers/introducers per session and that the time allocated for them should not exceed 25 per cent of the duration of the session.