

(English translation)

PC.DEL/294/08

14 April 2008

ENGLISH

Original: ITALIAN

**STATEMENT BY MONSIGNOR MICHAEL W. BANACH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE HOLY SEE,
AT THE 708th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

10 APRIL 2008

**RE: ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF FINLAND,
H.E. MR. ALEXANDER STUBB**

Mister Chairman:

1. The Delegation of the Holy See willingly joins previous speakers in welcoming the Minister for Foreign Affairs, H.E. Mr. Alexander Stubb, at his first appearance before the Permanent Council, and wishes him every success in carrying out the mission recently entrusted to him.

2. Finland today plays a role in international relations which does her honour. The name of its capital City is linked with one of the principal peace Accords of our time: the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, signed in Helsinki on 1 August 1975. The then thirty-five States which subscribed to that Act committed themselves to a process of consultation and collaboration, with internationally binding provisions, in matters of security, economy and environment, and the human dimension of cooperation between individuals and peoples. In this way and spirit, the current fifty-six State parties, together with various Partners for Co-operation, assume a certain number of well-defined obligations not only in relation to other States, but also with regard to their own citizens, whose specific rights are recognized in the Final Act.

3. By taking part in the Conference and signing that document, the Holy See expressed its full support for the "Ten Principles" enshrined therein, principles which constitute a kind of "declogue" for international relations and conduct. As is known, the Holy See's activity in this field is motivated not by political considerations but by the specific mission with which it is endowed. In this context, of special, though not exclusive, concern to the Holy See is the

question of freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, which is forthrightly recognized in the Seventh Principle of the Helsinki Accord. This principle is set forth in the Constitutions and legal charters of the various States, but its effective implementation reveals itself as a long road down which we still have to travel. While much still remains to be done in order to ensure that these rights are fully respected everywhere, it is to be noted that in the years since the Helsinki Final Act religious freedom is more and more widely recognized as a basic civil and social right, rather than as a mere concession or privilege. My Delegation hopes to be able to work with the Finnish Chairman-in-Office on this issue.

Mister Chairman:

4. The Minister for Foreign Affairs has reaffirmed Finland's commitment to the principles and ideals of our Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. In this, as in other matters, there is ample room for co-operation between him and the Holy See. Recalling the longstanding ties of friendship existing between the Holy See and Finland, my Delegation would like to assure him of its support and goodwill in the fulfilment of his important mission and, at the same time, wishes him every happiness in his task.

Thank you, Mister Chairman!