

HOLY SEE

Statement by Monsignor Anthony R. Frontiero
At the 2007 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
25 September 2007, Warsaw

During Working Session 2: Combating Intolerance and Discrimination and Promoting Mutual Respect and Understanding

Mr. Chairman,

The Delegation of the Holy See joins the previous delegations in congratulating you for chairing this session, and expresses its gratitude for the opportunity to participate in this important discussion. In particular, the Holy See conveys its sincere appreciation to the ODIHR for and welcomes the addition of the new webpage on Discrimination Against Christians that has recently been posed on TANDIS (Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Information System). Be assured that the Holy See will do its part in assisting the ODIHR in following and updating this new and important resource in the fight against the discrimination of Christians. In this regard, the Holy See would like to recommend that the OSCE continue to advance its proactive concern for this important matter in clear and concrete ways, including by monitoring and reporting data on incidents of discrimination and intolerance against Christians, and by sponsoring upcoming fora to address this issue among the participating States of the OSCE.

The consideration of tolerance and non-discrimination at the outset of this Meeting is a positive indication of the political will in the OSCE region to face squarely the problems between the interaction of cultures and peoples which constitute serious political and security issues, and ultimately enables us to relate to one another peacefully and contribute to the advancement of the human race.

The Delegation of the Holy See continues to be concerned with the all-too-often and flagrant violations against the right to freedom of religion throughout the OSCE region. Despite the decisions adopted by OSCE participating States to ensure and facilitate the freedom of the individual to profess and practice a religion or belief, alone or in community with others, through transparent and non-discriminatory laws, regulations, practices and policies, the realization of this commitment remains yet to be seen.

Recent examples of such violations include: the unacceptable intolerance demonstrated in Turkey this past April, where three Christian Bible publishers were brutally murdered in a religious-motivated attack; the condemnation, and in many cases detention and arrest, of “unauthorized” religious minorities for “illegal religious activities” because believers pray or go to church; and state introduced, drastic restrictions on religious freedom, including restrictions on missionary activity. Christians, in particular, in some places are being martyred, persecuted, and forced to flee their country just to survive. In many cases, despite the indications of religious-motivated violence, local police forces fail to intervene to stop attacks on religious minorities.

These episodes of religious violence highlight the underlying tension in the OSCE region around religious freedom. They also are evidence of a certain discrimination and intolerance against Christianity, and in some cases a vilification of Christianity; whereby the freedom of speech so readily granted to other groups is being abolished in the case of Christians, and the right to interpret the sacred texts of the Bible regarding certain issues is being stripped away, because some feel the Christian teaching on these matters is just too “offensive.” Demonizing Christianity, or deliberately mocking and undermining central tenets of the Christian faith as a means to promoting the rights of other groups is a clear and flagrant contradiction to the religious freedom and mutual respect that all people should enjoy, not to mention to the work of building a more just and peaceful community. Such practices and must be seen for what they are: a subversive attempt to dismantle the progress made thus far in the promotion of tolerance and non-discrimination.

In his Message for the celebration of the 2007 World Day of Peace, Pope Benedict XVI recalled the urgent need, even within the framework of current international difficulties and tensions, for a commitment to a *human ecology*¹ that favours the promotion of mutual respect and understanding among peoples, which is a key to ending intolerance and discrimination, and, ultimately to peaceful coexistence. Such a commitment must be guided by a vision of the person untainted by ideological and cultural prejudices or by political and economic interests, which can often instill hatred and violence.

Notwithstanding the reality of differences that exist within the various cultures of man, one element that cannot be admitted is the cultivation of seeds of hostility and violence against fellow human beings. “Equally unacceptable are conceptions of God that would encourage intolerance and recourse to violence against others.”² Peaceful coexistence among people is not only threatened by the conflicts between ideologies, but also by *indifference as to what constitutes man’s true nature*.³ Many in contemporary society actually deny the existence of a specific human nature, which only adds to confusion and, in many cases, hinders authentic dialogue. Clarity in this regard is needed so that a weak vision of the person will not open the door to authoritarian impositions and leave people defenceless and easy targets for oppression and violence.

A true human community where people can live together in peace and security presupposes respect for human rights. Yet, if these rights are grounded on a false conception of the person, how can they promote and safeguard a society built on mutual respect and understanding? Relativistic notions of what it means to be a person offer insufficient justification and defense of human rights; because if rights are absolute, how can they be founded on a notion that is merely relative? Human rights, therefore, must be grounded in the objective requirements of human nature. Otherwise, in some cases the human person is marked by a permanent dignity, and rights that are always and everywhere valid; in other cases a person may not have a permanent dignity, and negotiable rights.⁴ This state of affairs is what we witness everyday in acts of intolerance and discrimination. Without a clear and strong awareness of who we are as persons, it will always be easier to claim that some people are worthy of respect and others are not; some people have the right to life, liberty, and religious belief, and others do not. Objective truth about the dignity of the human person created by God, and the rights and subsequent duties and responsibilities that flow from that dignity, must be the basis for any authentic discussion of every issue that is facing the human family

Yet, the task at hand is not simply to condemn actual injustices in the light of an adequately understood concept of the human person and human dignity, but to work together for a meaningful new future⁵ Somehow, hopefully in part through our discussions in these days, we must break through the collective individualism which so often fuels discrimination and intolerance, and find our way to a new imagination based on solidarity. Such a new imagination will lead to a fundamental re-interpretation of social frameworks enabling them to truly foster mutual respect and understanding, and authentically defend human rights as basic conditions for life in community with others.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

¹Cf. Benedict XVI, *2007 Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace*, n. 10.

² *Ibid.*

³ Cf. *Ibid.*, n. 11.

⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, n. 12.

⁵ Cf. John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, n. 42.