

English Translation

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**STATEMENT BY MONSIGNOR MICHAEL W. BANACH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE HOLY SEE,
AT THE 815th PLENARY MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

17 JUNE 2010

**RE: ADDRESS BY THE HIGH REPRESENTATIVE FOR THE UN
ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS INITIATIVE**

Thank you, Mister Chairperson.

1. The Delegation of the Holy See joins previous speakers in welcoming the H.E. President Jorge Sampaio, High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, and thanks him for his presentation.

2. Over the past years, religion has very quickly become enormously important on the international scene. We speak more and more now about the encounter or even dialogue among religions and civilizations. International opinion is coagulating around the idea that there is a close connection between faith and culture and, therefore, between cultural dialogue and interreligious dialogue.

3. For these reasons, the Holy See, actively engaged in the dialogue between cultures and religions, attentively follows developments in the Alliance of Civilizations. At the same time, my Authorities are concerned that nowadays there is a tendency to claim that agnosticism and sceptical relativism are the philosophy and the basic attitude which correspond to democratic forms of political life. In other words, some say that, if we want to build a free and democratic society, we have somehow to tame God and – as it were - put him in a corner or constrain him to the limits of relativism.

As a result, my Delegation believes that the debates should not only focus on how to organize religious coexistence and pluralism legally and socially, but should also focus on the need to cultivate their underlying values. One of those values is the social dimension of religions or the openness of society to religion. Indeed, the religious dimension of the cultural identity of a society deserves respect and protection. It is natural, it is a concrete social benefit and lies at the basis of shared values. In this context, my Delegation would like to mention explicitly the problem of Christians in the public sphere who contribute, based on their religious convictions, to

the social, cultural and political life of our societies. The engagement of believers and their visible presence should be understood as enrichment of democracy and not as a danger for pluralism. When this does not happen, or where there is standardization or neutralization of the public sphere, then there is really no “multi” nor “cultural” nor “tolerant”. Saying that we should not ignore the social dimension of religion does not mean that the society should renounce its fundamental values and its cultural and religious identity.

I realize that these reflections might border on the philosophical, but they are important in explaining how the Holy See approaches the issue at hand.

Mister Chair,

4. My Delegation has equally followed with attention the statements of the previous Delegations, some of whom have expressed the desire to see a greater involvement of this Organization with the Alliance of Civilizations.

In this regard, it is important to note that any future relationship with the Alliance of Civilizations should not increase the current OSCE budget and must not become a formal partnership.

In any event, the relations between the two Organizations should take place within the framework agreed upon at the Ministerial Meeting in Helsinki: an eventual co-operation in specific projects, in areas of common interest and mutual benefit. Preferably, this co-operation should be undertaken in an informal way. The choice of possible projects should be decided by the Permanent Council.

Thank you, President Sampaio, for your reflections and thank you Mister Chairperson.