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STATEMENT OF THE HOLY SEE

TO THE

**OSCE CONFERENCE ON
COMBATING DISCRIMINATION AND PROMOTING
MUTUAL RESPECT AND UNDERSTANDING**

Opening Session

by

H. E. Msgr. Brian FARRELL
Secretary of the Pontifical Council
for the Promotion of Christian Unity

Bucarest, 7 June 2007

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished participants,

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The promotion of mutual respect and understanding are concerns of major importance in today's globalized world. With the phenomenon of inter-dependence extending to all spheres, it is also true that any contrasting instances of intolerance and discrimination are also of concern. History continues to present the tragic consequences that arise from the denial of human dignity, or from its being emptied of real content. Furthermore, not infrequently measures or policies are enacted that are contrary to the protection of human rights which can only find their foundation and their purpose in human dignity.

The Holy See is glad that consensus has been reached on an agenda for this meeting, and also believes that the agenda is well-grounded within the framework of the Human Dimension Committee, one of the most important contributing groups to the mission and work of the OSCE. My Delegation would like to express its gratitude for the excellent, professional and patient work of the staff of the Chairman-in-Office. This gratitude extends to the Authorities of Romania and its Delegation to the OSCE for their willingness to host this important event, and for the support provided in allowing all of us to arrive at this point.

Mr. Chairman,

I am confident that the first Part of the Conference, which deals with *Common and specific forms of intolerance and discrimination*, will allow us to build effectively upon the conclusions of the Cordoba Conference, as well as to strengthen the commitments already undertaken. In fact, in a world that is drawing ever closer together, the meeting of religions and cultures has become a topic of prime importance, and one that is certainly not just the business of theology. Thus the question of the interaction of cultures, and peace and respect for religions, has today become a political and security consideration of utmost importance. Ultimately it is a question of how we relate to one another peacefully and how we contribute to the education and advancement of the human race.

The structure of Part I thus enables us to respect religious affiliation and tackle specific instances and practices of discrimination against individual believers or religious denominations.

Anti-Semitism is a tragic violation of human dignity and the Shoah is a crime that has tainted the history of the human race. Discrimination against Muslims too is a grave offence to their human dignity and to the exercise of their right to freedom of religion. On numerous occasions, Pope Benedict XVI has condemned both phenomena, as well as persistent episodes of intolerance and discrimination directed against Christians.

The OSCE must avoid placing these three "open-wounds" in a sort of hierarchy: each of them "hurts" men and women, degrades their human dignity and, therefore, must be "cured" with solicitude. To be effective, the efforts of the OSCE must be carried out with the same determination in each of these three areas. In fact, if the Organization and its Participating States are not committed to adopting all those measures necessary to guarantee Christians the full exercise and enjoyment of their right to religious freedom, then, paradoxically, they will be discriminated against in their very fight against discrimination!

The Participating States of the OSCE have the obligation to defend the rights of religious minorities. It would be a mistake, however, if they did not attend to questions of intolerance experienced by believers who belong to majority-religions. It would also be contradictory for the OSCE and its Participating States to recognize the importance of religions but, in fact and at the same time, to consider some of them as potential risks, rather than as sure bearers of benefits.

It would also be a mistake to judge the patrimony of faith of the three monotheistic religions with a relativistic mentality, viewing them with the precarious and ever-changing parameters of political equilibrium, instead of connecting them to the timeless measuring rod of truth and the centrality of human dignity. This should be a firmly held conviction of the OSCE, if it is to contribute constructively to an authentic Alliance of Civilizations.

While it is not the immediate competence of the OSCE and its Participating States to enter into the content of inter-religious dialogue, which is properly speaking a matter for the religions themselves, it can, however, verify that such dialogue is respected by national constitutions, and ensure that the reciprocity needed to guarantee the free exercise of all religions in every society is upheld.

Mr. Chairman,

A discussion of the cross-cutting matters outlined in Part II will allow us to understand better how culture, in the classical sense, is always the manner in which society manifests its life and experience, assimilating into itself the experiences of the individual members and, likewise also moulding them. Thus society preserves and develops perceptions that go beyond what any individual is capable of - for good and, unfortunately, for bad.

It is our fervent desire that the discussions on these issues, specifically legislation, education and hate-crimes, as well as the outcome of this Conference, will be carried out in a way consistent with respect for the agreed language of the OSCE in the field of tolerance and non-discrimination, and therefore also in a manner that is based upon the existing commitments of the Organization, as mentioned in para. 14 of Decision No. 13, of the Brussels Ministerial Conference.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, the Holy See wishes to assure you of its commitment and desire to contribute actively to this Bucharest Conference which can yet be of help in the struggle for what concerns us all.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman!