



**THE HOLY SEE**  
**2016 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting**  
*Working Session 16: Rights of the child*  
*The right to meaningful children's participation*  
**Thursday, 29 September 2016**

Mr/Mme Moderator,

The Holy See is pleased to see attention given to the rights of the child within the OSCE context, and hopes that the discussions here today will be taken forward in the Human Dimension Committee and its future meetings.

The rights of children must be legally protected within every juridical system which should maintain as its primary focus the best interests of the child. Such protection must further reflect an authentic perspective of the rights and duties of the child according to international law, a law that is founded in the following principles:

- 1) the child has an inherent dignity as a human being and a human person from the moment of conception until natural death;
- 2) the child's rights and duties must be viewed within the context of the family;
- 3) full respect of the child's rights and duties requires special protection and promotion of the family's rights and duties;
- 4) the child's well-being is the primary responsibility of his or her parents and family;
- 5) the child has rights and duties with respect to the protection of his or her own life, and parents have correlative duties and rights to safeguard the child's life, from the moment of conception until natural death;
- 6) the child has a right and duty to be educated and parents have corresponding duties and rights to educate the child; and
- 7) the child has rights and duties concerning religious freedom, taking into consideration the parents' duties and rights to educate their child according to their own moral and religious beliefs.

The Holy See attaches great importance to education, which plays a great role in the promotion of tolerance and non-discrimination because it addresses the roots of the matter. Educational programmes should be developed and strengthened in order to promote a better understanding and respect for different cultures, ethnicities and religions. Education to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms is no less important.

It is worth noting that, in accordance to the indivisibility, interdependence and interrelation of human dimension commitments, in developing and performing these programmes participating States should always respect the right of parents to ensure

the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.

In this regard, it should be noted that such parental rights are not limited to the right of parents to choose schools for their children other than those established by public authorities, or the right to establish and manage alternative educational institutions; it also requires States to ensure that education in public schools does not pursue an aim of indoctrination and that children are not forced to attend classes that are not consistent with the convictions of their parents.

Last, but by no means least, the Holy See cannot but recall, as it did at the moment of its signing of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, that the life of the child begins at conception and therefore before its birth. In this respect, Preambular Paragraph nine of the CRC invites all of us to bear in mind that “the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth.” For this reason, the Holy See considers the phenomenon of abortion to be a morally unacceptable practice that contributes seriously to spreading a mentality that opposes life, representing a dangerous threat to any just and democratic society.

Thank you, Mr/Mme Moderator.