



PERMANENT MISSION OF THE HOLY SEE
TO THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY
AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

**STATEMENT BY MONSIGNOR MICHAEL W. BANACH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE HOLY SEE,
AT THE 741st MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

20 NOVEMBER 2008

**RE: REPORT BY THE PERSONAL REPRESENTATIVES OF THE
CHAIRMAN-IN-OFFICE ON COMBATING RACISM, XENOPHOBIA
AND DISCRIMINATION, ALSO FOCUSING ON INTOLERANCE AND
DISCRIMINATION AGAINST CHRISTIANS AND MEMBERS OF
OTHER RELIGIONS; ON COMBATING ANTI-SEMITISM; AND ON
COMBATING INTOLERANCE AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST
MUSLIMS**

Mr. Chairman,

1. The Holy See also joins other Delegations in welcoming the three Personal Representatives of the Chairman-in-Office and thanks them for their reports.

Their presence at the Permanent Council testifies to the importance which the OSCE attaches to this issue. In fact, in a world that is drawing ever closer together, the question about the meeting of religions and cultures has become a most important subject, and one that is certainly not just the business of theology. Thus the question of the peaceableness of cultures, of peace and tolerance in matters of religion, has also moved up to become a political and security theme of the first rank. It has ultimately become a question about how we relate to one another peacefully and how we contribute to the education of the human race.

2. The commitment of the Catholic Church to combating all forms of religious intolerance and discrimination is well known.

Speaking on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of that sad event which happened during the night of 9-10 November 1938 when the Nazi fury against the Jews broke out in Germany, Pope Benedict XVI said: *“Still today I feel pain for what came to pass in that tragic situation, the memory of which must serve to ensure that similar horrors do not repeat themselves ever again and that we commit ourselves, at all levels, to work against anti-Semitism, educating above all the young generations in respect and reciprocal acceptance. I invite you, moreover, to pray for the victims of those times and to unite with me in a profound manifestation of solidarity with the Hebrew world”* (Angelus Address, November 9, 2008).

3. At the beginning of November there took place in the Vatican an important Seminar organized by the “Catholic-Muslim Forum” established between the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and representatives of the 138 Muslim leaders who signed the Open Letter to Christian leaders of 13 October 2007. Addressing the participants in the Seminar, Pope Benedict XVI stated that *“Muslims and Christians have different approaches in matters regarding God. Yet we can and must be worshipers of the one God who created us and is concerned about each person in every corner of the world. Together we must show, by our mutual respect and solidarity, that we consider ourselves members of one family: the family that God has loved and gathered together from the creation of the world to the end of human history.”* He then went on to encourage the participants to *“work together in promoting genuine respect for the dignity of the human person and fundamental human rights, even though our anthropological visions and our theologies justify this in different ways. There is a great and vast field in which we can act together in defending and promoting the moral values which are part of our common heritage. Only by starting with the recognition of the centrality of the person and the dignity of each human being, respecting and defending life which is the gift of God, and is thus sacred for Christians and for Muslims alike – only on the basis of this recognition, can we find a common ground for building a more fraternal world, a world in which confrontations and differences are peacefully settled, and the devastating power of ideologies is neutralized.”* The Pope concluded his reflections by expressing the hope that these *“fundamental human rights will be*

protected for all people everywhere. Political and religious leaders have the duty of ensuring the free exercise of these rights in full respect for each

individual's freedom of conscience and freedom of religion. The discrimination and violence which even today religious people experience throughout the world, and the often violent persecutions to which they are subject, represent

unacceptable and unjustifiable acts, all the more grave and deplorable when they are carried out in the name of God. God's name can only be a name of peace and fraternity, justice and love. We are challenged to demonstrate, by our words and above all by our deeds, that the message of our religions is unfailingly a message of harmony and mutual understanding. It is essential that we do so, lest we weaken the credibility and the effectiveness not only of our dialogue, but also of our religions themselves" (Address to Participants in the Seminar Organized by the "Catholic-Muslim Forum", November 6, 2008).

4. Intolerance and discrimination against Christians, or "Christianophobia", consists of a negative categorical bias against Christians, both individually and collectively, against Christianity as a whole, or positions intrinsically part of the Christian faith. Such prejudice is a form of religious intolerance; it may be simply a mental or emotional attitude, or it may lead to stereotyping, discrimination, or even to persecution of Christians. It can also be spotted also in untruthful media reporting on the Catholic Church, portraying only a "caricature" of the Church. Interestingly, the term "Christianophobia" was coined by Jewish legal scholar Joseph Weiler.

Hate crimes, as well as incidents of intolerance and discrimination against Christians and members of other religions continue to be witnessed throughout the OSCE region and beyond. The recent outbreak of violence against whole Christian communities, the murder of Catholic priests, the kidnapping of women religious is a sobering reminder of that reality. Often these crimes happen without adequate responses from government authorities. Indeed, in some regions it is civic authorities themselves that open the door to hate motivated crimes against clergy and religious congregations. Across the OSCE region, many individuals and groups face restrictions on their right to freedom of religion or belief. Acts of discrimination against individuals in the work place and public services, defamation campaigns against minority religious groups, the disruption or prohibition of worship even in private homes, censorship of religious literature, the systematic abuse of registration rules and

procedures intended to infringe on the rights of entire faith communities, and the imprisonment and/or expulsion of clergy and individuals who profess religious beliefs considered illegitimate by the civil or other religious

authorities, are examples of how much more work must be done in order to stop the cycle of violence and hatred, and to ensure the equal protection of human rights under the law for all people.

In insisting on tolerance, the fight against anti-Semitism and discrimination and intolerance against Muslims is frequently mentioned, but various anti-Christian practices are oftentimes ignored. The international community must fight Christianophobia with the same determination as they would fight hatred against members of other religious communities. In this, the OSCE is to be considered a pioneer in listing the fight against discrimination and intolerance against Christians as one of the areas to which participating States have committed themselves. My Delegation looks forward to contributing to these discussions in a future round-table meeting.

It is in this context that the Holy See encourages the Personal Representative of the Chairman-in-Office on Combating Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination, also Focusing on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians and Members of Other Religions to continue to devote specific attention and develop effective proposals to address the above-mentioned phenomena against Christians. These are core aspects of the mandate of the Representative, as it was made clear in the negotiations that brought to its institution.

In general, what is needed is the commitment of more focused energy and efforts to fulfilling the OSCE commitments agreed upon by all participating States, instead of a broadening of these commitments. Undue attention to other concerns, even if legitimate, serves only to distract the efforts of the OSCE, as well as to forestall effective and timely measures to address the original commitments, many of which have yet to be implemented.

5. In conclusion, Mister Chairman, my Delegation wishes all the best to the three Personal Representatives of the Chairman-in-Office in the exercise of their mandate which may yet be of help in the struggle for what concerns us all.

Thank you, Mister Chairman.