



THE HOLY SEE

Statement of Archbishop Józef Wesołowski
Apostolic Nuncio
Head of the Delegation of the Holy See
to the OSCE Tolerance Implementation Meeting on
Promoting Inter-Cultural, Inter-Religious and Inter-Ethnic Understanding
Almaty, 12-13 June 2006

Session 4

*The way forward: strengthening the role of the OSCE in facilitating
inter-cultural, inter-religious and inter-ethnic understanding through dialogue and partnerships*

Mr Moderator,

When the late Pope John Paul II visited Kazakhstan, in September 2001, he noted that it “is a country in which the world can see accord and harmony between different peoples as an eloquent sign of the vocation of all peoples to live together in peace, in mutual knowledge and openness, and an ever deeper discovery and appreciation of the distinctive traditions of each people.” John Paul II also said that Kazakhstan is “a land of encounter, exchange and newness; a land which makes it possible to experience difference not as a threat but as an enrichment.”

I believe that these observations have been reflected in our debates during these days. At present I would like to outline, or at least suggest, some practical ways to strengthen the role of the OSCE participating States and of the OSCE institutions in facilitating inter-cultural, inter-ethnic and inter-religious understanding through dialogue and partnerships.

1) The OSCE is well aware that peace is rooted in respect for religious freedom. Consequently the OSCE participating States and its institutions should be vigilant that all the OSCE standards and commitments related to religious freedom are fully complied and that respect is maintained towards religion and its contribution to

public life, as a factor of cohesion in the contemporary multi-ethnic and multi-cultural societies.

The OSCE and its participating States should also ensure respect for all religions and avoid possible reticence or unwarranted selective attention to some of them.

2) The second area of attention regards the media. “The communications media have acquired such importance as to be the principal means of guidance and inspiration for many people in their personal, familial, and social behaviour.” (*Apostolic Letter, The Rapid Development, Pope John Paul II*). Mass media constitute a patrimony to safeguard and promote”; however, they should also “enter into the framework of organically structured rights and duties, be it from the point of view of formation and ethical responsibility, or from reference to laws and institutional codes”. (*Ibid.*)

In recent months, the media have shown the dramatic consequences of offending religious sensibilities. All religious groups should be protected from manipulation of their teachings and inaccurate or disrespectful presentation of their members and backgrounds. It is necessary to guarantee that the media and the public show respect for religion, their teachings and symbols. When the media or civic and political debates give little value to religions or present them using prejudice or disdainful language, religions are no longer able to effectively work against these stereotypes, since they themselves are victims of them. An authentic pluralism in the media requires giving accurate accounts of events concerning religion, a guarantee that religious communities are also able to have access to the media, and especially that any form of hate speech is definitively banned, whether against Christians or members of all other religions.

3) A third area is education. In this regard the Holy See follows with great interest the ODIHR project on Education promoting Respect and Diversity. Education is an integral factor for maintaining one’s culture and identity and is a necessary element for harmoniously integrating a person into society. In this context particular emphasis should aim at programs which attempt to eliminate negative stereotyping in text books in relation to national minorities, religions and cultures, especially in the development of history curricula.

Thank you Mr Moderator.