

**THE HOLY SEE****2016 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting**

*Working Session 10: Tolerance and non-discrimination I – address by OSCE  
HCNM*

**Monday, 26 September 2016**

Mr. Moderator,

The Holy See considers the exclusion of the members of national minorities from the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms to be, not only the seedbed of strife and conflict, but undermining the inherent dignity of every human being. The whole of humanity, beyond its many differences, should form a community that is free of discrimination between peoples and strives for reciprocal solidarity. For these reasons, the Holy See believes the OSCE's work for national minorities, in particular through the office of the High Commissioner and its staff, to be crucial to the Organization, and that the HCNM's focus on early warning and conflict prevention cannot be emphasized enough.

National minorities should further our attention on their specific rights and duties. The first and obvious right of minorities is the one to exist. It can be ignored in many ways, for example, by its denial through overt or indirect forms of extinction or marginalization. Secondly, national minorities have the right to preserve and develop their own culture, including their language. In this respect the education of children through parental transmission of language and cultural identity plays an essential role. Thirdly, the right to religious freedom applies to all communities, as well as to individuals. Consequently, national minorities should be free to profess and practise their religion, including the freedom to worship as a community. Finally, they should also be guaranteed a legitimate freedom of exchange and contact with groups having a common heritage, even if they live in the territory of another State.

Because every right carries with it corresponding duties, members of minority groups also have duties towards society. In the first place, they have the duty to contribute, like all citizens, to the common good of the State in which they live, and to all citizens of that State. Secondly, a minority group has the duty to promote the freedom and dignity of each one of its members and to

respect the decisions of each one, even if someone were to decide to adopt the majority culture.

The Holy See was most pleased with the event earlier this year that celebrated the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Hague Recommendations regarding the education rights of national minorities, and participated actively in its discussions. The celebration affirmed once more the key role education played and continues to play for and among national minorities in the OSCE region, and its notable contributions to conflict-prevention work.

Education, especially of the young, contributes to make every human being a peace-maker and promoter of true tolerance and non-discrimination. Therefore, educational programmes should be developed, promoted and strengthened in order to advance a better understanding and respect for different cultures, ethnicities and religions. These programmes should also instil universal values, such as respect for the dignity of every person, solidarity among people and respect for the other's religion, as such values would also reduce harmful misunderstandings and stereotypes. Education, therefore, in addition to being a means of promoting the active participation of national minorities in social and political life, becomes a place where tolerance and non-discrimination are nurtured and bridges for peace and stability are constructed for society as a whole.

Such a vision, such a use of education in our societies, is a formidable tool in reducing tension involving national minorities – tensions that time and time again have shown themselves to be potent triggers for violent conflict and instability within and between participating States. Furthermore, education that allows all groups to learn about and from one another is also vital in combating hate speech, whose victims so often are from national minorities.

The Holy See believes in the principle that every human person, irrespective of his or her ethnic, cultural or national origin, or religious belief, possesses an inherent dignity. It is out of this dignity that the universal human rights flow, and it is this dignity that we strive to defend, uphold and value when we defend human rights. The Catholic Church is close to those members of national minorities who are suffering. The Church shares their moments of pain and their reasons for legitimate pride. My Delegation is confident that, through the commitments of the OSCE and the “quiet diplomacy” of its High Commissioner on National Minorities, the trials of national minorities may soon cease and that they all may be secure in the enjoyment of their rights.

Thank you, Mr. Moderator.