



THE HOLY SEE
2017 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
Opening Session
Monday, 11 September 2017

Madam Chair,

The Holy See is pleased to take part in this 2017 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, and thanks Poland, our host country, for its hospitality, as well as the Austrian OSCE Chairmanship and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, for planning and organizing this meeting.

My Delegation wishes to take this opportunity to congratulate Your Excellency on your appointment as Director of the ODIHR and expresses its best wishes for your work in assisting and supporting the participating States in the implementation of their human dimension commitments. The Holy See assures you of its wish for continued and constructive dialogue and cooperation with your Office.

Since the negotiations that led to the Helsinki Final Act, the Holy See has placed special emphasis on the human dimension of the OSCE, as security, safety and peace are not the result of restricting human rights, but rather of their enjoyment by all, without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion. Therefore, the Holy See considers the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting a central component of the OSCE structure, as it allows all 57 participating States, not only to take stock, but also to confirm our common course towards a region second-to-none in its respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Since the previous HDIMs, the Holy See has been outlining, in significant detail, its position on the main human dimension issues that face the 57 participating States. These statements make available to both Delegations and representatives of civil society the well-known and principle-based views of the Holy See.

Therefore, I would take this opportunity to dwell briefly on a few key concepts related to human rights and fundamental freedoms in general:

In the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, human rights are described as universal, inalienable and inviolable. These three characteristics stem from the deepest “foundation stone,” namely the divinely-given nature of human dignity. Human rights are *universal* since they apply to all humans without exception of time, place or subject. They are *inviolable* insofar as they are inherent in the human person and are expressions of human dignity, and because the proclamation of these rights demands complete respect from every person and enjoins respect, for every person, everywhere. Finally, these rights are *inalienable* insofar as no one – whoever he or she may be – can legitimately deprive others of these rights, since this would contradict their very nature.

The Holy See has furthermore often expressed concern about removing these rights from their proper context, restricting the range of application of rights and permitting the meaning and interpretation of rights to vary and their universality to be denied in the name of different cultural, political and social perspectives. Such an approach, similar to one that considers human rights and fundamental freedoms as privileges granted by the State (to be revoked whenever it pleases), does lasting harm to the very idea of human rights and certainly impairs their enjoyment by every man and woman. As Pope Francis has stated: “The dignity of the human person and the common good rank higher than the comfort of those who refuse to renounce their privileges.”¹ Therefore, the term “human right” must be strictly and prudently applied, lest it becomes a rhetorical catch-all, endlessly expanded to suit the passing whims of the age. Such an elastic approach would discredit the very concept of human rights. To the proper understanding of ‘human rights’, the Holy See lends its moral support and thereby encourages the participating States to make human rights and fundamental freedoms a reality for all.

The Holy See strongly believes that for human rights to bear fruit, not only must they be proclaimed in words, but they must also be put into practice.² In his first World Day of Peace Message, Pope Francis expressed this deep regret: “In many parts of the world, there seems to be no end to grave offences against fundamental human rights.”³ It is clear that the OSCE is ideally placed to correct such offences, advance the cause of universal human rights and promote the much-needed accurate protection of these rights.

OSCE participating States agreed on the principle that the full respect, and the implementation in good faith, of all commitments are of fundamental importance for the stability and security of the OSCE area. In this perspective our Organization represents a political forum whose activities are related to security, and whose decisions consensually adopted by the participating States need to be fully implemented in good faith. This fundamental idea frames also the work of this HDIM, which is essentially focused on discussing implementation of the OSCE human dimension commitments, many of which still need to be fully implemented, rather than on expanding them.

In this regard, it would be advisable to recognize that calls to expand OSCE commitments without acknowledging the specific approach of the OSCE as a regional security arrangement – as the Holy See has so often highlighted – only serves to dilute OSCE programs and projects and to duplicate activities of other organizations. At the same time, it should be noted that the concept of “interpretation” cannot be used in a way that leads to a substantial amendment, overruling or transforming existing OSCE commitments, since such an approach

¹ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, § 218.

² Cfr. Pope Benedict XVI, Address to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See (January 2008).

³ Pope Francis, *Message*, World Day of Peace, 2014, § 1.

would be in contrast with the *bona fide* principle and the Rules of Procedure of the Organization.

In conclusion, my Delegation would like to wish all organizers and participants at this 2017 HDIM fruitful discussions, assuring everyone of our constructive engagement during the next two weeks.

Thank you, Madam Chair.