



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 832nd MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

28 OTTOBRE 2010

**RE: REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE FOR
DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

Thank you, Mister Chairperson.

1. The Delegation of the Holy See joins the previous speakers in warmly welcoming back to the Permanent Council the Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), Ambassador Janez Lenarčič, and thanks him for his detailed report outlining the most prominent issues that have occupied the attention of his Office during the last few months.

2. The emphasis on election observation missions and its related dialogue, as well as on democratization goes to the heart of the mandate of the ODIHR. As such it is very much welcome. The Holy See has always followed with particular interest and attention these activities of the ODIHR and desires that they effectively contribute not only to the creation of a culture of the rule of law, but also to the promotion of human rights and democracy.

3. Human trafficking is fundamentally a human rights problem that requires an equally multi-dimensional response of prevention, education and awareness, assistance to victims, and professional development. My Delegation has noted that the ODIHR is currently finalizing guidance for practitioners and policy makers on human rights protection in the return of trafficked persons and it looks forward to its publication. In this context, the Holy See believes that it is imperative to address the cultural and economic factors contributing to human trafficking, which include prostitution, pornography, corruption, poverty, unemployment, and underdevelopment and to take pro-active measures to put traffickers and exploiters

out of business, to restore societies wherein human dignity and respect for all persons is not only recognized but upheld through the rule of law and manifested in cultural realities.

4. My Delegation also notes that the ODIHR has also undertaken work to assist participating States in meeting relevant OSCE commitments on migrant integration and civic participation of migrants and would like to encourage these efforts. At the same time, however, the Holy See is concerned that, especially in this time of economic crisis, there is a tendency to put the rights of migrants aside. We must remember that all human beings without exception, including all migrants, are endowed with inalienable rights which can neither be violated nor ignored. States have the duty to protect the inalienable rights of all persons, be they irregular migrants or not, because a migrant's status is quite separate from his or her human dignity.

5. Freedom of religion or belief is a “fundamental human right that protects the transcendental dimension of the human being.” Therefore, it means more than just mere tolerance, but respect and appreciation for religion which is a vital part of human life in its individual and social aspects. In this context, regarding the ODIHR’s work with the Venice Commission in order to update the *Guidelines on Reviewing Legislation Pertaining to Freedom of Religion or Belief*, the Holy See is confident that churches and religious communities will be involved in the process and appropriately consulted. They have a wealth of experience to offer and can provide unique and valuable perspectives from the ground.

6. In the area of tolerance and non-discrimination, the Holy See is pleased to note the recent efforts of the ODIHR in those areas where participating States have reached consensus. Agreed commitments should not remain mere theoretical guidelines. They are, in reality, inspiring principles for the ODIHR activities and, at the same time, set clear boundaries that must be respected to guarantee the effectiveness and “added value” approach in the area of the defense of human rights.

There is no place in the modern world for anti-Semitism. In order to combat intolerance and discrimination against Muslims all of us must learn to work together. We should also hold firm to a basic principle of this Organization that rejects “the identification of terrorism with any nationality or religion”.

At the same time, this Organization has issued a clarion call to address the denial of rights, exclusion and marginalization of Christians and members of other religions in our societies. Indeed, Christians are a vital part of European societies

but, unfortunately, both to the East and West of Vienna they are often affected by acts of discrimination and intolerance. Pope Benedict XVI clearly mentioned this during his recent visit to the UK: “I cannot but voice my concern at the increasing marginalization of religion, particularly Christianity, that is taking place in some quarters, even in nations which place a great emphasis on tolerance.” (*Pope Benedict XVI, Address to British Society, Westminster Hall, 17 September 2010*).

There are also many incidents of hate crimes against Christians and the Holy See has reported these to the ODIHR for inclusion in the Annual Hate crimes Report to be released in mid November. Likewise, defamation campaigns against minority religious groups, including verbal harassment and threats against Christian missionaries and evangelists, as well as similar attacks upon even majority religious groups in the context of increasingly secularized societies, is cause for alarm and merit protection against intolerance and discrimination.

Against this background, the Holy See would appreciate the elaboration of educational material by the ODIHR as a concrete step to address the problem of discrimination against Christians.

7. The *OSCE Action Plan on Roma and Sinti* calls for enhanced access to quality education as a key to overcoming the vicious cycle of poverty and social exclusion that so often affect people on the move, including Roma and Sinti. The Delegation of the Holy See commends the ODIHR particularly as it continues to reinforce the efforts of participating States and relevant OSCE institutions and structures aimed at ensuring that Roma and Sinti people are able to play a full and equal part in our societies, and at eradicating discrimination against them. Such efforts have been met with a degree of success, including an increased awareness among Roma and Sinti themselves of their ability to influence their own circumstances through political participation and their own desire to attain literacy and professional formation. The dignity of Roma and Sinti populations must therefore be safeguarded, their families protected, their collective identity respected, initiatives for their education and development encouraged, and their rights defended.

8. In conclusion, I would like to assure the Director of the ODIHR of the co-operation of the Delegation of the Holy See and renew the wish for every success as he continues to carry out the mandate entrusted to him by the participating States.

Thank you, Mister Chairperson!