

**STATEMENT BY MONSIGNOR MICHAEL W. BANACH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE HOLY SEE,
AT THE 709th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

17 APRIL 2008

**RE: ADDRESS BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE ARAB LEAGUE,
H.E. MR. AMRE MOUSSA**

Mister Chairman:

1. The Delegation of the Holy See willingly joins previous speakers in welcoming the Secretary General of the Arab League, H.E. Mr. Amre Moussa , in his first appearance before the Permanent Council: *As-salámu 'aláikum!*

My Superiors appreciated the participation of H.E. Mr. Moussa in the funeral rites of His Holiness Pope John Paul II in April 2005.

2. Until 2000, the relations between the Holy See and the League of Arab States were limited to personal contacts. All the Secretaries General have visited the Pope and have demonstrated appreciation, in particular, for the position of the Holy See on the Middle East. Relations were made official in February 2000 and the Apostolic Nuncio to Egypt is charged with following these relations in Cairo. It is our hope that these relations will be further formalized in the near future.

3. The Holy See has followed the initiative of the Arab League in elaborating, thanks also to the personal mediation of its Secretary General, a "plan" for the solution of the political crisis in Lebanon and appreciates all the efforts undertaken. There can only be long-term damage from emigration from that country, above all on the part of young people. Furthermore, the confiscation of Christian land and wells in the north of the country is to be denounced. The Holy See stands ready to help and to work together for the success of this initiative of the Arab League.

In terms of Iraq, my Delegation is extremely concerned about the emigration from the country of members of the Christian community. They represent a long-standing culture in Iraq and their absence would be a major set-back to the establishment of a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional society. In this regard, my Delegation welcomes the Secretary General's call for reconciliation in Iraq.

Mister Chairman:

4. The action of the Holy See in the context of subjects of international law is marked by its persevering search for a sincere dialogue which emphasizes what unites rather than what divides, so as to foster understanding between nations, the achievement of peace and justice, the defense of each people's distinctive, legitimate features and concrete solidarity with the less fortunate. The path of dialogue and mutual understanding with respect for differences should be encouraged so that true peace may be pursued and the meeting between different peoples may take place in a context of solidarity and understanding.

In a world deeply marked by violence, it is bitterly ironic that even now some of the worst conflicts are between believers who worship the one God. In the face of certain attempts to distort religion and abuse sacred traditions, it is necessary to reassert forcefully that practices which incite people to violence and contempt of human life are contrary to God and humanity. Especially when religious identity coincides with cultural and ethnic identity it is solemn duty of believers to ensure that religious sentiment is not used as an excuse for hatred and conflict.

Often involved in specifically educational tasks for children and young people, religions in this respect have an important responsibility to assume concerning the content of their teaching, to combat and reject any sectarian approach and, vice-versa, to develop and encourage all that leads to a deeper knowledge of and respect for others. The Catholic Church is attending to this mission in her own domain with determination.

5. In conclusion, Mister Chairman, my Delegation assures the Secretary General of the Arab League of its commitment to promoting a sincere, profound and constant dialogue between believing Catholics and believing Muslims, in the hope that there can arise a strengthened mutual knowledge and trust, in reciprocal commitment to understanding and respect.

Thank you, Mister Chairman!