



**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 808th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

6 MAY 2010

**RE: ADDRESS BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE
ORGANISATION OF THE ISLAMIC CONFERENCE,
H.E. EKMELEDDIN IHSANOGLU**

Thank you, Mister Chairperson.

1. The Delegation of the Holy See willingly joins the previous speakers in warmly welcoming H.E. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu to the Permanent Council and thanks him not only for his visit, but also for his remarks.

2. My Delegation would like unequivocally to stress the esteem and the profound respect that Catholics and Christians have for Muslim believers, by calling to mind the words of the Second Vatican Council Document Nostra Aetate: “*The Church looks upon Muslims with respect. They worship the one God, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to humanity and to whose decrees, even the hidden ones, they seek to submit themselves wholeheartedly, just as Abraham, to whom the Islamic faith readily relates itself, submitted to God*” (n. 3). The strengthening of bridges of friendship with the adherents of all religions is a priority for the Catholic Church. In this spirit, the Holy See has repeatedly emphasized its commitment to developing further a sincere and respectful dialogue with the Muslim communities, based on ever more authentic reciprocal knowledge which recognizes the religious values that we have in common and, with loyalty, respects the differences. As Pope Benedict XVI underlined in 2005 in Cologne in a Meeting with Representatives of Some Muslim Communities: “*Interreligious and intercultural dialogue between Christians and Muslims*

cannot be reduced to an optional extra. It is, in fact, a vital necessity, on which in large measure our future depends.”

Likewise, Christians and Muslims must learn to work together in order to guard against intolerance and to oppose all manifestations of violence. Religious authorities and political leaders must guide and encourage their followers and constituents in this direction. The Catholic Church also deplores that crimes have been committed which offend God and humanity and throw discredit on Islam. We should hold firm to a basic principle of the OSCE that rejects the “*identification of terrorism with any nationality or religion*”.

The lessons of the past must therefore help us to seek paths of reconciliation in order to live with respect for the identity and freedom of each individual, with a view to fruitful cooperation in their service of all humanity. As Pope John Paul II said in a memorable speech to young people at Casablanca: “*Respect and dialogue require reciprocity in all spheres, especially in that which concerns basic freedoms, more particularly religious freedom. They favour peace and agreement between peoples*” (n. 5).

3. In fact this peace and agreement means working together in promoting genuine respect for the dignity of the human person and fundamental human rights. There is a great and vast field in which Muslims and Christians can act together in defending and promoting the moral values which are part of our common heritage. Only by starting with the recognition of the centrality of the person and the dignity of each human being, respecting and defending life which is the gift of God, and is thus sacred for Christians and for Muslims alike – only on the basis of this recognition, can we find a common ground for building a more fraternal world, a world in which confrontations and differences are peacefully settled, and the devastating power of ideologies is neutralized.

It is the Catholic Church’s hope that these fundamental human rights will be protected for all people everywhere. Political and religious leaders have the duty of ensuring the free exercise of these rights in full respect for each individual’s freedom of conscience and freedom of religion. The discrimination and violence which even today religious people experience throughout the world, and the often violent persecutions to which they are subject, represent unacceptable and unjustifiable acts, all the more grave and deplorable when

they are carried out in the name of God. God's name can only be a name of peace and fraternity, justice and love. We are challenged to demonstrate, by our words and above all by our deeds, that the message of our religions is unfailingly a message of harmony and mutual understanding. It is essential that we do so, lest we weaken the credibility and the effectiveness not only of our dialogue, but also of our religions themselves.

4. In his Message for the End of Ramadan 2009, the President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, wrote: "*It seems that in diverse places of the world we have passed from tolerance to a meeting together, beginning with common lived experience and real shared concerns. This is an important step forward*" (n. 7). May God, the Almighty, continue to bless our common efforts in overcoming the threats of security, thus helping us to offer a significant contribution to the re-establishment and strengthening of peace both within nations and between peoples, in accordance with the profound desires of all believers and all men and women of goodwill.

Thank you, Mister Chairperson.