



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 778<sup>th</sup> MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

**29 OCTOBER 2009**

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

Madam Chairwoman:

1. The Delegation of the Holy See willingly joins other speakers in warmly welcoming back Ambassador Janez Lenarčič, Director of the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, to the Permanent Council, and thanks him for his report.

2. Ambassador Lenarčič's Report reveals how he has dedicated himself with professionalism to the various areas of the mandate of the ODIHR.

My Delegation would like to note with appreciation Ambassador Lenarčič's remarks on mandate and commitments, expressed also last Tuesday in the context of the Corfu Process dialogue.

3. The Holy See believes that ODIHR's Human Rights program should continue to focus on fundamental freedoms and should help participating States in their efforts to ensure that fundamental freedoms are respected.

One of the fundamental freedoms that is significantly challenged today is the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief. It is clear that some of these challenges are age-old, and are manifested in acts of intolerance, violence, and discrimination, such as State interference in the ability of people to pray and worship, social hostility or stereotyping of religions. Other challenges have

arisen in more recent times, in increasingly relativistic societies, where efforts are being made to subordinate the freedom of religion, or to eradicate it altogether. The OSCE commitment to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief clearly indicates that religious faith properly understood is not to be regarded with grudging suspicion, or as a bizarre quirk or quaint relic left over from a simpler past. It is a fundamental right that protects the transcendental dimension of the human being and, therefore, his or her dignity. To be sure, participating States' commitment to freedom of religion protects the right to keep our faith private. It does not, however, require the privatization of faith; rather, it promotes the contribution that religion can offer to the public sphere.

In this context I would like to refer to something that the German philosopher and sociologist Jurgen Habermas once said. He stated that when secularized citizens act in their role as citizens, they must not deny in principle that religious images of the world have the potential to express truth. Nor must they refuse their believing fellow citizens the right to make contributions in a religious language to public debates.

**4.** My Delegation believes that ODIHR's tolerance work should focus on the priority areas of combating intolerance where the participating States have reached consensus - combating anti-Semitism; intolerance and discrimination against Muslims; Christians and members of other religions, and racism, xenophobia and related intolerance.

The Round Table Meeting on the theme *Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians*, held in Vienna in March 2009, was a successful and hopeful event, and revealed the possibility of constructive dialogue toward mutual understanding and respect among Christians, members of other religions, and non-believers. It is hoped that a follow-up to this Round Table will be forthcoming. And it is further hoped that, in the future, the Annual ODIHR Report on Hate Crimes give greater consideration to the incidents against Christians that take place in the OSCE region.

**5.** In conclusion, my Delegation would like to wish Ambassador Lenarčič every success in carrying out the mandate entrusted to him by the Permanent Council, as well as to assure him of the willingness of my Delegation to engage in constructive dialogue with his office.

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman!