



**STATEMENT OF THE HOLY SEE
AS DELIVERED BY MSGR. JANUSZ URBAŃCZYK,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE HOLY SEE,
AT THE SUPPLEMENTARY HUMAN DIMENSION MEETING
ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF:
FOSTERING MUTUAL RESPECT AND UNDERSTANDING
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Session II:

*Creating the conditions for meaningful and sustained interreligious dialogue
in order to secure stability and security in the OSCE region*

Madam Moderator,

The participating States have recently committed themselves to “*promote and facilitate open and transparent interfaith and interreligious dialogue and partnerships*”¹. Adopting this commitment they undertook to create the proper atmosphere where inter-religious dialogue can take place, but it should be noted that governments act beyond their scope when they seek also to condition the content, timing or framework of the dialogue itself, or when they attempt to intrude on the inner workings of the autonomous religious bodies concerned.

Religious groupings exist as legitimate forms of society entitled to an internal institutional structure in accordance with their own doctrinal principles, including distinctive ministries, officers or hierarchy, their training and certification, legitimate mutual relations between local leadership and higher authority within the religious body, the publishing and disseminating of materials – within and outside places of worship – through the means of social communication, concerning their moral teaching on human activities and the organization of society, as well as the freedom to pursue their charitable, educational and social activities. There is nothing new here, all of this is affirmed in the Helsinki Final Act. Suppression of any of these undermines the conditions for authentic dialogue. Where any of these are not fully respected by the State or with its tacit condonation, an open and positive concept of the State is undermined. To counter this, awareness should be raised regarding the constructive contribution religions make to educational, cultural, social and charitable sectors of society. Such an approach will also favour increased dialogue with the large communities of immigrants in the OSCE area. The State does well to appreciate the contribution these activities make towards the social net and the common good.

Another necessary precondition for dialogue is that consultations proceed according to the dictates of reason, without which dialogue between actors holding a wide variety of convictions could never be possible. No religious group should be considered immune from

¹ OSCE Ministerial Council, Kiev 2013: Decision No. 3/13 – Freedom of Thought, Conscience, Religion or Belief.

legitimate criticism; however, where its leaders are maligned or investigated simply for elaborating their convictions in perfect accord with the established beliefs of their confession, an impression is created that all believers are under official suspicion, thus seriously undermining essential preconditions for dialogue.

During his recent Apostolic Visit to Sarajevo, Pope Francis observed that “dialogue is a school of humanity, a builder of unity, which helps build a society founded on tolerance and mutual respect.” Indeed, religions have an essential role to play in the construction of democratic societies that are genuinely inclusive. Understanding the meaning of this role is a sign of political wisdom on the part of States and international organisations.

Moreover, freedom of expression emerges as the next associated freedom – intimately associated with guaranteeing religious freedom. Legitimate diversity needs, therefore, to be valued and celebrated if truly open and fruitful dialogue is to take place in an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding. The mere existence of controversy concerning views at variance with other interlocutors (including the State) should never be the occasion of stifling free expression. In the interplay between religious freedom and freedom of expression, it merits mentioning that there is no reason to feel offended by the expression of the deeply held religious convictions of others. Undermining freedom of expression imposes a cure worse than the disease should the perceived intolerance of one group elicit the intolerance of the majority.

Whereas the initiative for inter-religious dialogue may stem either from the religious communities themselves or from State actors, in practice the former proves more fruitful than the latter. Accordingly, the Holy See takes the position that it is not the immediate competence of the OSCE and its participating States to enter into the content of interreligious dialogue, which is, properly speaking, a matter for the religions themselves.

Thank you Madam Moderator.