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OSCE HDIM, Session 13 Tolerance and non-discrimination

Combating racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism

Combating discrimination against Christians, Muslims and members of other religions

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Distinguished Delegates of OSCE Member States,

Distinguished representatives of international and civil society organizations,

Dear ladies and gentlemen,

Let me first of all thank OSCE ODIHR, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, for their kind invitation to present an introduction to the important issues of this session on Combating racism, xenophobia, combating anti-Semitism and discrimination against Christians, Muslims and members of other religions.

The values of Western civilization are under attack by aggressive minorities of European citizens who are determined to deny other European and foreign citizens the fundamental right to live in accordance with their cultural and religious identity.

These ideological minorities who exploit the freedom of opinion for psychological provocation and who bend the democratic system to make it fit their idea of political exclusivism are intent on revolutionizing contemporary society by imposing a narrative of hatred towards all forms of cultural and religious diversity.

At the juridical level, the lobbies of these movements tend to deny the organized representatives of cultural and religious minorities any right of citizenship and integration, imposing cultural homologation with the claim that Western identity should remain exclusive and unmarred. Their racism follows 20th century ideologies on the purity and impurity of races, and they claim that their fundamentalism is the only model of the superiority of Western civilization while promoting "liberation" from all the other philosophical, cultural and spiritual interpretations developed throughout the history of humanity.



Key words such as "legally incompatible" or "culturally foreign" have become verdicts of this modern *Court of the Inquisition* which exacerbates the demonization of cultural and religious differences and even denies the universal heritage of the multiple identities of faith and thought that have contributed to the intellectual and scientific progress of humanity.

The political propaganda of these movements swings between the apology of a sectarian and exclusive solution and the denial of any dignity of thought and worship that is not associated with its own ideological monologue. Other methods of communication envisage interpretations that falsify religious doctrines and cultural matrices, hence generating myths of false dangers that jeopardize the freedom, well-being and health of the people and of the nation.

A dark fascination seems to charm and stimulate the minds of some violent young people and adults who have been trained to "purify" their neighbourhoods of foreigners or minorities of Jews and Muslims who have often been respectable citizens of European society for generations. They attack their funerary monuments, private schools, businesses, synagogues, churches and mosques and the homes of the members of these communities. Episodes of vulgarity, hatred and psychological, physical, and even personal violence, are becoming increasingly common in many cities in Europe. Discriminatory actions undermining the right to work or to education or health and the freedom to organize and practice one's religion, based on the identity or cultural origin of the family or religious affiliation, are on the increase in many States Europeans. Alternatively, foreign citizens together with believers of different religious denominations seem to be the object of special concessions where they have access to the benefit of some rights but according to a standards which are different from those of the "normal citizen" and in any case they are in fact excluded from equal opportunities and the fullness of rights that every man and woman should enjoy.

To justify the narrative of these discriminatory attitudes, three recurring themes against cultural and religious pluralism are mainly used: influx of migrants and refugees from territories in conflict or that are poverty-stricken, international security against terrorism and the condition of women.

Statistical surveys on the alleged invasion of citizens and believers from Asia and Africa are biased to prompt the defence of the "Western race" and preference for the immigration of only Christian workers. The criminal conduct and male chauvinism of the subversive groups is adroitly confused with the identity of communities which, instead, are the victims and hostages of these terrorist manipulations.



Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu citizens have nothing to do with criminals who confuse nationalism with false religious wars and who ignore the perspective of the sacredness of life taught by the prophets.

On the contrary, the civil commitment of religious leaders and citizens of all faith communities, together with the democratic institutions in each State of Europe, are evidence of the success of the ecumenical, interreligious and intra-religious, intercultural and interdisciplinary model of defense of the dignity and rights of religious pluralism.

For years, MJLC, the Council of Muslim and Jewish Leaders of Europe, has developed a network of fraternal collaboration in the fight against anti-Semitism and against the discrimination of Muslim religious minorities. The recent MJLC assembly held in Matera, capital city of European culture, set up some working groups among which one on religious freedom in interaction with the institutions of the European Union and one on the defense of kosher and halal food precepts ensuring full protection of animal wellbeing. The testimony of European rabbis and imams who work together to protect the authenticity of doctrinal interpretations from erroneous misinterpretations confirm the responsibility of the authoritative representatives of religious minorities in building unity within the diversity of the European program. Any misunderstanding, by Europe, of the added value of religious pluralism would undermine the history and identity of Europe itself on a spiritual, political, cultural and social level and would create only chaos.

At the same time, thanks to the collaboration of international organizations in Europe in support of interreligious and intercultural dialogue such as KAICIID, it has been possible to set up intra-religious collaboration and training networks among Muslims in Europe, such as the EULEMA Council. Some of its members have actively participated in the work inspired by the recent Abu Dhabi declaration signed by Pope Francis and Imam Ahmad al-Tayyeb on Human Fraternity. Training programs and programs to prevent radicalism together with integration projects on democratic citizenship and religious freedom in the fields of education, health and also international trade are solutions of great farsightedness for the cohesion and familiarity between peoples and cultures. Shared ethics and the pursuit of achieving the common good bring together citizens and institutions, believers of different cultures and different political positions.

The future of Europe and the protection of its roots and identity from all irrational and totalitarian extremism depend on this enlightened collaboration.