



THE HOLY SEE
2014 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
Working Session 2: Fundamental Freedoms I. Freedom of expression
Tuesday, September 23, 2014

Mr. Moderator,

Freedom of expression is certainly among the main preconditions of free societies. It represents a keystone of democracy. My Delegation has always expressed its strong support for freedom of expression and the free exchange of ideas, including religious beliefs and moral teachings. Freedom to seek and know the truth is one of the basic human rights and it should be respected by all.

Strengthening the principles and practices of a free, professional and responsible media is the most sustainable way of encouraging a media culture that works towards building peace. Only a media that is vibrant, fair, independent and beyond censorship can contribute to a genuine dialogue and reconciliation across divides.

Accurate reporting of events, full explanation of matters of public concern, and fair representation of diverse points of view must, then, always be fostered. At the same time distortions that occur when the media industry becomes self-serving or solely profit-driven, losing the sense of accountability to the common good must be resolutely avoided or prevented by all legal means. One must also be aware that beyond being informative, media outlets are also formative with responsibility to service to the common good, to the truth, goodness and beauty.

Therefore, seen from an ethical viewpoint, one must always keep in mind that freedom of expression and freedom of the media are not absolute. There are obvious instances such as slander and insult, hate and conflict fostering messages among individuals and groups, indecency and pornography or the explicit depiction of various forms of violence, where no right to communicate exists. Plainly, too, free expression should always observe principles like truth, fairness, and respect for privacy and family life. In his address to the Executive Directors and Employees of the Italian Radio-Television Network – RAI earlier this year, His Holiness Pope Francis stated:

“In the end, the ethical quality of communication is the result of conscientious — not superficial — attention, always respectful of people, both those who are the subject of information and the recipients of the message. Each, in his own role and with his own responsibility, is called to be vigilant in maintaining a high level of ethics

in communication.” (*Address of Pope Francis to the Executive Directors and Employees of the Italian Radio-Television Network – RAI, Saturday, 18 January 2014*)

Hence, professional communicators should be actively involved in developing and enforcing ethical codes of behavior for their profession, in cooperation with public representatives. In this sense we reiterate our support for the Ministerial Council decisions 13/06 and 10/07 stating that “the recognition of the essential role that the free and independent media can play in democratic societies and the strong influence it can have in countering or exacerbating misperceptions and prejudices and in that sense continues to encourage the adoption of voluntary professional standards by journalists, media self-regulation and other appropriate mechanisms for ensuring increased professionalism, accuracy and adherence to ethical standards among journalists”.

Religious bodies and other groups likewise deserve to be part of this continuing effort. Precisely because contemporary media shape popular culture, they themselves must overcome any temptation to manipulate, especially the young, and instead pursue the desire to form and serve. In this way they protect, rather than erode, the fabric of a civil society worthy of the human person. This does not mean, as so many times on various occasions was expressed by my Delegation, that critics or truth, even if uncomfortable, should not be said, far from that. However, when it is about manipulation, and intentional distortion of reality or other disinformation, then responsible media are simply a necessity for the good of individuals and for the common good of society.

Mr. Moderator,

In conclusion, my Delegation would also wishes to express some concerns in regards to freedom of expression, including through the media, which deserve due attention. While public mocking of religions, their founders or leaders, communities or individuals is often seen and defended as free expression of various kinds, on the other hand there are certain individuals or groups as well as certain forms of behavior in regard to which any kind of negatively perceived expression is more and more often drastically sanctioned, both offline and online. While we reject any deliberate mockery, provocation, denigration and similar acts we cannot remain silent in front of the regular humiliation of believers, in particular when it comes to what is sacred to them, justified by freedom of others to express themselves. As we know all freedoms have their limits; therefore appropriate measure should be undertaken to ensure that people of faith are not mercilessly and without consequences exposed to hate and intolerance protected and justified by the right of free expression.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman!