



STATEMENT OF THE HOLY SEE

2019 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

Working Session 13: Tolerance and non-discrimination II, including Combating racism, xenophobia, and discrimination, and Combating anti-Semitism and intolerance and discrimination against Christians, Muslims and members of other religions

Warsaw, 24 September 2019

Mr./Mme Moderator,

No part of the OSCE region – from Vancouver to Vladivostok – is immune from acts of intolerance and discrimination, including hate crimes against Christians and members of other religions. These include threats and violent attacks, resulting sometimes even in murder or in the profanation of Christian churches and places of worship of other religions, cemeteries and other religious properties. These sadly are not an infrequent reality in the entire OSCE area.

These phenomena, which give rise to a sense of insecurity, have a negative impact on the daily lives of Christians and members of other religions, and their enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms. They can also threaten the social cohesion inside participating States.

The starting point for the development of any response to intolerance and discrimination based on religion should be the recognition that these challenges are of mutual concern. While their strongest impact is on the lives of the targeted community, the problem needs to be recognized and addressed by our societies as a whole. Wherever any religious community is persecuted and marginalized because of its religious beliefs, the well-being of society is endangered and each one of us is diminished.

Moreover, we should always bear in mind that Christians are targeted both in countries where they are a minority as well as those in which they represent the majority. Therefore, all attacks should be given equal attention, irrespective of whether they are directed at the majority or minority group, avoiding any partial or selective approach.

Our efforts to prevent and combat religious intolerance and non-discrimination cannot be considered apart from the longstanding OSCE commitments on freedom of religion or belief: a certain misconceived notion of “tolerance” cannot be an excuse for denying or not guaranteeing religious freedom.

On the other hand, elements of anti-discrimination legislation in some participating States seem to be in contrast with the relevant OSCE commitments, because such legislation does not take into consideration and ensure the autonomy of Christian communities, preventing them from organizing themselves and acting in accordance with their beliefs and interests. In many places, Christians face a certain contempt, even though their faith inspires them to contribute to the common good and to a peaceful society.

Of great concern is the fact that across the OSCE region a sharp dividing line seems to have been drawn between religious belief and religious practice. The false idea that religions have a negative impact and represent a threat to the well-being of our societies is growing. Christians are frequently reminded in public discourse or even in the courts that they can believe whatever they like in private and worship as they wish in their own churches, but they are prohibited from acting on those beliefs in the public sphere.

According to such growing opposition to the public role of religion, actions inspired by religious belief are unwelcome in some of our societies. The consequence of this is that individuals are prevented from living and acting in accordance with the dictates of their conscience, a right that was recognised already by the Helsinki Final Act.

According to our commitments, OSCE and its participating States should engage in consultation with religious communities¹ and promote the participation of these communities in public dialogue, even through the mass media². Therefore, participating States are called upon to welcome and encourage the representatives of religious communities to give their views – based on moral convictions deriving from their faith – about everyday life. However, the media and public discourse are not always free from attitudes of intolerance and, sometimes, of actual denigration of members of all religions, with Christians being the easiest target. Advocacy of “politically correct” issues all too often provides sufficient justification to label and denigrate Christians as bigoted or intolerant.

Finally, the Holy See wishes to recall one of the glaring omissions of participating States in fulfilling what they agreed to undertake, namely the still incomplete Basel tasking. In their Declaration No. 8/14, the OSCE Ministers of Foreign Affairs articulated their joint understanding that the participating States should “elaborate Ministerial Council Declarations on enhancing efforts to combat intolerance and discrimination, including against Muslims, Christians and members of other religions”. This tasking, despite the efforts of some Delegations to re-interpret established fact, remains an obligation incumbent on us all.

My Delegation wishes to thank once more the Serbian, German, Austrian and Italian Chairmanships for their proposals and attempts to ensure progress on the Basel tasking. While we regret that the last four years of negotiations have been unsuccessful and at times very unhelpful, there has also been a slow – but undeniable – progress in terms of keeping it alive and raising awareness of the issue. The active engagement of ever more Delegations in the negotiations, the number of important points found to be agreeable to all, and the growing recognition of the real and tangible impact of discrimination and intolerance against Muslims, Christians and members of other religions in our societies all suggest that we are moving forward. The Holy See, therefore, remains confident that it will be possible – sooner rather than later – to reach the consensus on the *Ministerial Council Declarations on enhancing efforts to combat intolerance and discrimination, including against Muslims, Christians and members of other religions*, thereby accomplishing the decision taken and articulated in Basel.

Thank you, Mr./Mme. Moderator!

1 CSCE Concluding Document of Third Follow-up Meeting, Vienna, 1989; OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/13.
2 CSCE Concluding Document of Third Follow-up Meeting, Vienna, 1989.