

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

**STATEMENT OF H.E. BISHOP MARIO TOSO, SDB,
HEAD OF THE DELEGATION OF THE HOLY SEE TO THE
OSCE HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE ON TOLERANCE AND NON-
DISCRIMINATION
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Session 3: Combating racism, xenophobia and discrimination, also focusing on intolerance and discrimination against Christians and members of other religions

1. The problems discussed in the present session do not affect only individual Christians, but religious confessions as such. They affect not only minority religious groups but majority ones as well. It is simplistic to impute systematically to majority religions the weak protection or lack of protection afforded by State authorities to other religious communities. Likewise it is to be noted that the threats against religious identity are present both to the East and West of Vienna, even when they take on varying forms and differing grades of intensity in accordance with time and place and circumstances.

2. With the increase of religious intolerance in the world, it is well documented that Christians are the religious group most discriminated against as there may well be more than 200 million of them, of different confessions, who are in situations of difficulty because of legal and cultural structures that lead to their discrimination. In his Address to the Members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, on 11 January 2010, Pope Benedict XVI observed: *“The community of believers can and wants to take part in this, but, for it to do so, its public role must be recognized. Sadly, in certain countries, mainly in the West, one increasingly encounters in political and cultural circles, as well in the media, scarce respect and at times hostility, if not scorn, directed towards religion and towards Christianity in particular. It is clear that if relativism is considered an essential element of democracy, one risks viewing secularity solely in the sense of excluding or, more precisely, denying the social importance of religion. But such an approach creates confrontation and division, disturbs peace, harms human ecology and, by rejecting in principle approaches other than its own, finishes in a dead end. There is thus an urgent need to delineate a positive and open secularity which, grounded in the just autonomy of the temporal order and the spiritual order, can foster healthy cooperation and a spirit of shared responsibility. Here I think of Europe, which, now that the Lisbon Treaty has taken effect, has entered a new phase in its process of integration, a process which the Holy See will continue to follow with close attention. Noting with satisfaction that the Treaty provides for the European Union to maintain an*

“open, transparent and regular” dialogue with the Churches (Art. 17), I express my hope that in building its future, Europe will always draw upon the well springs of its Christian identity. As I said during my Apostolic Visit last September to the Czech Republic, Europe has an irreplaceable role to play “for the formation of the conscience of each generation and the promotion of a basic ethical consensus that serves every person who calls this continent ‘home’ ” (Meeting with Political and Civil Authorities and with the Diplomatic Corps., 26 September 2009) .”

3. The Holy See is convinced that the international community must fight intolerance and discrimination against Christians with the same determination as it would fight hatred against members of other religious communities. In this, the OSCE is to be considered a pioneer in listing the fight against discrimination and intolerance against Christians as one of the areas to which participating States have committed themselves. What emerged clearly from the Round Table discussion in March 2009 is that intolerance and discrimination against Christians is manifested in various forms across the OSCE area. While denial of rights may be an important issue where Christians form a minority, exclusion and marginalization may also be experienced by Christians where they comprise a majority in society.

4. In spite of the commitments undertaken by member States of the OSCE in the area of religious freedom, in some countries intolerant and even discriminatory laws, decisions and behaviour, either by action or omission, which deny this freedom, still exist against the Church and Christian communities, and against other religious communities, as well as their respective members. There are recurring episodes of violence and even killings against Christian believers. Undue restrictions remain against the registration of Churches and religious communities, as well as against the importation and distribution of their religious materials. There are also illegitimate interferences in the area of their organizational autonomy, preventing them from acting consistently with their own moral convictions. At times undue pressure is brought to bear upon people working in public administration in contrast with their freedom to behave in accordance with the dictates of their own conscience. At times civic education is deficient in duly respecting the identity and principles of Christians and of members of other religions, and there are clear signs of resistance against the recognition of religion's public role.

Yet the traditional engagement of the OSCE in favour of religious freedom springs from the precise conviction that such a freedom is a fundamental dimension of the human person and not something related only to the private sphere of individuals; it benefits the social fabric and has security implications because of its public dimension. The specific contribution of Christians to the construction and well-being of our democratic systems is an added valued for society, and the acknowledgment of this contribution is a guarantee and an

expression of true pluralism. The distinction between spiritual and civil realities does not in fact entail estrangement, indifference and incommunicability, but dialogue and interaction at the service of the authentic good of the human person. Pope Benedict XVI has repeatedly pointed out that secularity is not secularism. Consequently, if religious communities dissent from legislative measures or administrative decisions, or propose alternative initiatives, this should not be considered *ipso facto* as a form of intolerance. Vice versa it would be intolerant to seek to prevent these communities from acting in this way or denigrate them just because they propose different options. Ethical relativism - which holds nothing as definitive - cannot be considered a condition for democracy, as if by itself it could guarantee tolerance and mutual respect among persons and allegiance to majority decisions. A healthy democracy promotes the dignity of every human person and respect for his or her inviolable and inalienable rights. Without an objective moral anchorage, not even democracy can ensure a stable peace (cf. *Evangelium vitae*, No. 70).

5. Nor are the media and public discourse always free from attitudes of intolerance and, sometimes, of actual denigration of Christians and members of other religions. Effective pluralism in the media requires correct information on religious realities, the guarantee of access to the media for religious communities and the banishment of hate speech against Christians and members of other religions. With full respect for freedom of expression and in the context of the legislative and juridical system of each country, mechanisms and tools against manipulation of the messages of religious communities and the disrespectful presentation of their members should be prepared.

6. In the light of the above-mentioned abuses, the OSCE should devote specific attention and develop effective proposals to fight intolerance and discrimination against Christians. In fact, the Holy See is convinced of the importance that the institution of the three Personal Representatives brings to the promotion of tolerance and non-discrimination in the priority areas where the participating States have reached consensus: namely, combating anti-Semitism; intolerance and discrimination against Muslims; Christians and members of other religions, and racism, xenophobia and related intolerance. My Delegation expresses appreciation for the balanced work of this year's Representatives who have dedicated attention to the core aspects of their mandates in the spirit of the negotiations that brought about their institution.

In fact, this year's concerted effort of the three Personal Representatives has shown that what is needed is the commitment of more focused energy and efforts to fulfilling the OSCE commitments agreed upon by all participating States, instead of a broadening of these commitments. Undue attention to other concerns, even if legitimate, serves only to distract the efforts of the OSCE, as well as to forestall effective and timely measures to address the original commitments, many of which have yet to be implemented.