

**Statement of Dr Massimo Introvigne,
Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Combating
Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination, also Focusing on Intolerance and
Discrimination against Christians and Members of Other Religions
HDIM, Warsaw, October 4, 2011**

I came to this mandate with a background not as a politician or a diplomat, but with some thirty years of experience as a sociologist of religion and religious liberty activist. Those who came in touch with me this year would probably agree that this background may involve both advantages and disadvantages. The mandate is broad, and the time is short. I will limit myself to four remarks about four main areas of the mandate.

1. Racism. Social theory teaches us that economic crises generate stereotyping and scapegoating of minorities, easily degenerating into racism. Recent experience shows that this stereotyping is unfortunately not limited to marginal racist organizations, but occasionally contaminates mainline political speech. Intolerance should not be tolerated, be it intolerance against immigrants, refugees, women or any other minority. Working with NGOs and civil society is particularly important in this field, and several NGOs gave us a real treasure of information, particularly during our country visits.

2. Roma and Sinti issues. The growth of intolerance against Roma and Sinti communities is also in part a consequence of the international economic crisis. Two main aims of the mandate have been to involve directly Roma organizations in any international and domestic discussion about their community, and to facilitate conversations between the same Roma organizations, ODIHR specialized personnel, and some participating States. At least with respect to certain States, some real progress has been made, although visits to settlements and communities in several countries confirmed that much remains to be done.

3. Members of other religions. I fully understood my mandate not to be only about Christians, and recently had a significant meeting with leaders of the Sikh community in what is now the largest European Sikh temple, in Northern Italy. They report that problems still exist, but their situation has significantly improved in several participating States. I also interacted with so called traditional or "tribal" religions, particularly - in conversation with the World Intellectual Property Organization and other relevant actors in this field - in connection with one of their concerns, the protection of their "traditional knowledge" through the use, and the prevention of possible misuse, of intellectual property. But I also tried not to forget the non-traditional religions and experiences, by meeting representatives of both

new religious movements and of secular humanist organizations, which are struggling for appropriate forms of legal recognitions in some countries.

4. Christians. The September 12, 2011 conference on hate crimes against Christians in Rome, with its quite high attendance, confirmed that these crimes are a matter of great international concern. The spiral of intolerance against Christians can be described through a three-step model. First comes intolerance, a cultural phenomenon. Second, discrimination, a legal process. Third, hate crimes. The social actors involved in the three steps are obviously different. But there is a slippery slope from the first step to the second and from the second to the third. I am very much aware that my role as Representative is not to be a spokesperson for any Christian church or community. But it involves hearing their claims and complaints, checking the facts, and discussing these claims with the relevant participating states. It should be recognized that not all claims should be accepted at face value. Christian churches and communities may have been responsible of hurting local sensitivities in different ways. But it is also a fact that intolerance against Christians is growing in many countries and regions.

My mandate is about building bridges. Bridges between countries. Bridges between religions. Bridges between religions and governments. Bridges between believers and unbelievers. Bridges between those who cherish the religious heritages of their countries and those who cherish traditions of separation between church and state.

Bridges are also about friendship. Let me conclude by mentioning that in this year I saw professional acquaintances grow into real friendships with personnel of OSCE , ODIHR and the Lithuanian chairmanship, women and men of great professional capabilities and moral integrity. For this, I am particularly grateful.