



**STATEMENT OF THE HOLY SEE
AS DELIVERED BY MSGR. JANUSZ URBAŃCZYK,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE HOLY SEE,
AT THE SUPPLEMENTARY HUMAN DIMENSION MEETING
ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF:
FOSTERING MUTUAL RESPECT AND UNDERSTANDING**

Vienna, 2 July 2015

Session I:

Freedom of Religion or Belief and fostering mutual respect and understanding in the OSCE area – opportunities and challenges

Madam Moderator,

The Holy See is pleased to participate in this timely gathering on OSCE commitments to freedom of religion or belief – a fundamental human right. In fact, for over 40 years, the Holy See has sought dialogue and cooperation through its participation in the OSCE, arguing passionately during deliberations for the Final Act of Helsinki that its Ten Principles prioritise among all human rights that of freedom of religion or belief – which we consider to be a founding freedom for a secure and stable Europe and OSCE area and for the world – as the surest guarantee of the inviolable dignity and transcendence of the human person. Wherever freedom of religion or belief is protected and properly exercised, other fundamental freedoms also flourish.

As has been evidenced, perhaps more frequently in its breach than in its observance, respect for religious freedom lies not at the periphery but rather at the very heart of the maintenance of security and stability in the OSCE area.

The twenty-first century undoubtedly faces its own, very different challenges. Security and stability in many OSCE countries is presently challenged by the call to extend hospitality to desperate migrants fleeing from situations of religious intolerance and discrimination towards the beacon of hope represented by respect for religious diversity.

The re-emergence of hate crimes, associated intolerance towards adherents not only of the minority religions, but also increasingly against Christians – as well as a trend towards marginalization of religious belief from public debate – suggests a disturbing augmentation in intolerance towards belief in general, as the Annotated Agenda to this meeting attests. The resurgence of anti-Semitism and ethnic-religious tensions in Europe, the spread of discrimination against Muslims and recriminations against Christians appear with increasing frequency in the public agenda.

The growing phenomenon of non-belief in Europe also poses its own questions concerning the sort of secularism pursued by some States and the quality of its respect, understanding or tolerance towards legitimate expressions of religious belief in the public realm; indeed, it challenges the close relationship between religious rights and another cherished European bulwark against tyranny, namely, freedom of expression. In this regard, my delegation argues for a proper and broader interpretation of these legitimate expressions than the ones listed in the Annotated Agenda for this meeting. Problems concerning the inclusion of religious believers in public life, their professional exclusion on account of their religious convictions, including conscientious objection,¹ are all too often swept under the rug of a new political correctness which downplays intolerance or discrimination especially when visited upon Christian believers, even in democratic countries.

Intolerance towards the challenges which religion poses to secularist perspectives falls far short of authentic pluralism, risking instead the triumph of the lowest common denominator, vitiating human freedom through insistence on a uniform single-mindedness and undervaluing the positive contribution religious institutions make to society, precisely on account of their distinctive ethos or value system.

Finally, my delegation also notes positive examples emerging from the OSCE in term of raising awareness of governments and civil societies regarding these phenomena. The Holy See recommends and encourages such efforts as appropriate for the further advancement of freedom of religion and belief through this institution.

Thank you, Madam Moderator.

¹The Helsinki Final Act provides the right for the individual “to profess and practice ... religion or belief acting in accordance with the dictates of his own conscience”. See also Article 10 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and UN Human Rights Committee’s General Comment no. 22 of 30 July 1993 (Article 18 of the ICCPR).