

## HOLY SEE

### 2006 OSCE Human Implementation Meeting

#### Working Session 13

##### *Religious Freedom*

Mr. Chairman,

“In a certain sense, the source and synthesis of all rights is religious freedom, understood as the right to live in the truth of one’s faith and in conformity with one’s transcendent dignity as a person.”

Religious freedom, the right to honor God according to the sincere dictates of one’s own conscience, and therefore the right to practice religion privately and publicly, is essential for peace-building. In this regard, significant movements in the world religions, including Christianity, are promoting peace, justice, and ecological care as an essential dimension of their religious commitment. Men and women involved in these movements recognize an intrinsic connection between their religious faith and the active concern for the well-being of society. There seems to be the potential for a universal solidarity in this regard.

On the other hand, there is also a disturbing development accompanying this revitalization of religion—the emergence of fundamentalist movements. Fundamentalists in all religions tend to interpret their sacred texts in a unilateral, reductive, and simplistic way, which is impermeable to reason. They demand internal unanimity, repudiate the mainstream of their own tradition, and refuse to engage in dialogue with outsiders. To disagree with them is to become their enemy. Fundamentalism breeds the kind of religion that is capable of blessing violent action against people and powers perceived as an embodiment of evil.

Moreover, as raised at the Cordoba Conference, secularism and ethical relativism at times generate discrimination and intolerance against Christians and other religions. It happens that when some religious groups express their concerns regarding legislative measures or administrative decisions, this is sometimes considered as a manifestation of intolerance by those groups. Likewise, concerns were raised about cases of interference in the self-organization of Christian and other religious confessions, which prevent them from acting consistently with their own moral convictions.

Any theology of religious pluralism is only complete if it recognizes the need of all religions to be delivered from their shortcomings and failures, and to be renewed in accordance with their most authentic aspirations. Interreligious dialogue and cooperation, in the service of promoting peace and justice, and human dignity as the cornerstone to all human rights, have the capacity to rescue religions from ideological distortions and make them more faithful to their deepest values. Without betrayal of its divine gifts, dialogue of this kind calls the human family to engage itself in renewal and reform, to become more authentic and true to itself.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.