



PERMANENT MISSION OF THE HOLY SEE
TO THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY
AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

ENGLISH only

**STATEMENT BY MONSIGNOR MICHAEL W. BANACH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE HOLY SEE,
AT THE 779th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

5 NOVEMBER 2009

**RE: REPORT BY THE PERSONAL REPRESENTATIVES OF THE
CHAIRMAN-IN-OFFICE ON COMBATING RACISM, XENOPHOBIA
AND DISCRIMINATION, ALSO FOCUSING ON INTOLERANCE AND
DISCRIMINATION AGAINST CHRISTIANS AND MEMBERS OF
OTHER RELIGIONS; ON COMBATING ANTI-SEMITISM; AND ON
COMBATING INTOLERANCE AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST
MUSLIMS**

Madam Chairwoman,

1. The Holy See also joins other Delegations in welcoming the three Personal Representatives of the Chairman-in-Office and thanks them for their reports.

Their presence at the Permanent Council testifies to the importance which the OSCE continues to attach to this issue. In fact, in a world that is drawing ever closer together, the question about the meeting of religions and cultures has become a most important subject, and one that is certainly not just the business of theology. Thus the question of the peaceableness of cultures, of peace and tolerance in matters of religion, has also moved up to become a political and security theme of the first rank. It has ultimately become a question about how we relate to one another peacefully and how we contribute to the education of the human race.

2. The commitment of the Catholic Church to combating religious intolerance and discrimination is well known.

Speaking of the Shoah, Pope Benedict XVI reflected that *“images come to mind from my repeated visits to Auschwitz, one of the concentration camps in which the heinous slaughter of millions of Jews occurred, innocent victims of a blind racial and religious hatred. As I affectionately renew the expression of my full and unquestionable solidarity with our fellow receivers of the First Covenant, I hope that the memory of the Shoah will lead humanity to reflect upon the unfathomable power of evil when it conquers the heart of man. May the Shoah be a warning for all against forgetfulness, denial or reductionism, because violence committed against one single human being is violence against all. No man is an island, as a famous poet wrote. May the Shoah teach both old and new generations that only the arduous path of listening and dialogue, of love and forgiveness leads peoples, cultures and religions of the world to the desired goal of fraternity and peace in truth. May violence no longer degrade the dignity of man!”* (General Audience, 28 January 2009).

3. On the occasion of his May 9, 2009 Meeting with Muslim Religious Leaders in the Mosque al-Hussein bin Talal in Amman, Pope Benedict XVI observed that *“we cannot fail to be concerned that today, with increasing insistency, some maintain that religion fails in its claim to be, by nature, a builder of unity and harmony, an expression of communion between persons and with God. Indeed some assert that religion is necessarily a cause of division in our world; and so they argue that the less attention given to religion in the public sphere the better. Certainly, the contradiction of tensions and divisions between the followers of different religious traditions, sadly, cannot be denied. However, is it not also the case that often it is the ideological manipulation of religion, sometimes for political ends, that is the real catalyst for tension and division, and at times even violence in society?”* He then continued that *“in the face of this situation, where the opponents of religion seek not simply to silence its voice but to replace it with their own, the need for believers to be true to their principles and beliefs is felt all the more keenly. Muslims and Christians, precisely because of the burden of our common history so often marked by misunderstanding, must today strive to be known and recognized as worshipers of God faithful to prayer, eager to uphold and live by the Almighty’s decrees, merciful and compassionate, consistent in bearing witness to all that is true and good, and ever mindful of the*

common origin and dignity of all human persons, who remain at the apex of God's creative design for the world and for history."

4. 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 2009 Address to the Members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, Pope Benedict XVI observed: *"Acts of discrimination and the very grave attacks directed at thousands of Christians in this past year show to what extent it is not merely material poverty, but also moral poverty, which damages peace. Such abuses, in fact, are rooted in moral poverty. As a way of reaffirming the lofty contribution which religions can make to the struggle against poverty and the building of peace, I would like to repeat in this assembly, which symbolically represents all the nations of the world, that Christianity is a religion of freedom and peace, and it stands at the service of the true good of humanity."* After referring to incidents of violence against Christians in Iraq and India Pope Benedict XVI expressed the hope *"that, in the Western world, prejudice or hostility against Christians will not be cultivated simply because, on certain questions, their voice causes disquiet."*

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 came out clearly from the Round Table discussion last March 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.

5. 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 - 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.

In conclusion, my Delegation wishes all the best to the three Personal Representatives of the Chairman-in-Office. I believe it was the Jewish writer Chaim Potok who wrote: "All beginnings are hard." Although they have just begun, the exercise of the mandate of the three Personal Representatives may yet be of help in the struggle for what concerns us all.

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.