



THE HOLY SEE
Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on
Combating Racism, Intolerance and Discrimination in Society through Sport
Session I: Racism, Intolerance and Discrimination:
Contemporary Manifestations and Challenges
Thursday, April 19, 2012

Mister Moderator!

At the heart of fundamental human rights is freedom of religion, conscience or belief. This is a constant in OSCE documents, stretching from the Helsinki Final Act to the Astana Summit Commemorative Declaration. Numerous other international documents also recognize and uphold that the spiritual dimension of life is a vital part of human existence.

Unfortunately, in recent times, there is an increased proliferation of episodes of discrimination and acts of violence against persons and communities of faith and places of worship in the OSCE region that denies in practice the commitments – be they legally-binding or political ones.

In fact, 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. Recent articles have demonstrated how Christians either have lost the protection of their societies or have experienced some government-imposed and unjust restrictions, or have become victims of violence resulting from an impulsive bigotry (cf. Ayaan Hirsi Ali, “The War on Christians,” in *Newsweek*, February 13, 2012).

A recent sociological study also confirms this alarming trend (cf. Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Rising Restrictions on Religion*, Washington, DC, August 2011). Over the three-year period studied, incidents of either government or social harassment were reported against Christians in 130 or 66% of countries in the world – the highest percentage of religious discrimination. Furthermore, according to the study, the largest share of social hostilities toward religion is seen in Europe, where harassment against Christians was reported in 69% of countries on that Continent.

The world of sport, too, is not exempt from this blatant and increasing current manifestation of intolerance and discrimination – one which sometimes even promotes actual denigration of Christians and members of other religions. Last

autumn, a major sports broadcasting network aired a Sunday morning special exploring why an up-and-coming player on a professional football team had become the “most polarizing figure” in this country’s national sports. The discussion revealed that the player in question had become the most polarizing figure not on account of his skills, but rather due to the fact that he is an unabashed Christian, who visits sick children and maintains views on sexuality and marriage in conformity with natural law. What is even more amazing is the fact that there is not the slightest evidence that this player has ever forced himself and his convictions on his teammates or on an unsuspecting public (cf. George Weigel, “Tim Tebow and Christianophobia”, in *First Things*, October 5, 2011).

All of this illustrates how the nexus between religion and security seems to be confronting us in a more critical way on a daily basis. Indeed, a glimpse of the world shows that religious violence or conflict, or even apparently innocent discrimination associated with religion is omnipresent. It seems that whenever religion is associated with conflict, there exists a higher level of lethality. And there is sociological and political research which provides ample evidence that where any conflict has a religious component, then it is likely to be of longer duration, larger scope, higher intensity and higher severity - possibly because religious values are non-negotiable values; they are harder for communities to deal with.

In the light of the reality of discrimination against Christians and members of other religions and as a contribution to security in the OSCE area, the Holy See would like to offer the following three recommendations:

- that the international community fight intolerance and discrimination, as well as hate incidents and crimes against Christians with the same determination as it would fight hatred against members of other religious communities;
- that participating States of the OSCE, which have committed themselves to fight against discrimination and intolerance against Christians, dedicate more attention to hate crimes against Christians, as well as collect reliable statistics on these crimes and to send them to the ODIHR; and finally
- that an International Day against Discrimination of Christians be instituted and that the OSCE/ODIHR become the chief promoter of such an initiative.

Thank you, Mister Moderator!