



## HOLY SEE

Statement of Cardinal Walter Kasper,  
President of the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews  
Head of the Delegation of the Holy See  
to the OSCE Conference on Anti-Semitism

Berlin, 28 April 2004

Mr. Chairman,

In my capacity as President of the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, which was established in order to promote and deepen the dialogue with the Jews on a global level, I wish to thank the German Government for hosting this International Conference. It offers me the opportunity to remind those present that the Catholic Church deplores all manifestations of anti-Semitism, to which the Jews have been subjected throughout the ages.

In this regard, I presume most of you are familiar with the Second Vatican Council's Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, which explicitly states: "*Mindful of her common patrimony with the Jews, and motivated by the gospel's spiritual love and by no political consideration, [the Catholic Church] deplores the hatred, persecutions, and displays of anti-Semitism directed against the Jews at any time and from any source*" (n.4).

This is the position of the Catholic Church on anti-Semitism, and therefore various statements of the Roman Pontiffs have given voice to this deep awareness, emphasizing that anti-Semitism has no place within the Catholic Church. It is in the context of this strong conviction that one should consider the special place that fraternal relation with the Jews occupies in the heart of Pope John Paul II. Indeed it is in the light of this awareness of the Catholic Church, so clearly expressed by the Holy Father, that all initiatives of his Pontificate regarding religious relations with the Jews have taken place.

I think that most of you also remember that, shortly before his historic visit to the Holy Land in the year 2000, Pope John Paul II asked for God's forgiveness for all the harm that Christians had committed against Jews in the past. Then, while at Yad WaShem holocaust memorial, he invited to "build a new future in which there will be no more anti-Jewish feeling among Christians or anti-Christian feeling among Jews, but rather the mutual respect required of those who adore the one Creator and Lord", and to look to Abraham as our common father in faith.

On the occasion of an Audience with the American Jewish Committee, on February 5 last, taking into account the recent increase in attacks against Jews in Europe, the Pontiff stressed that "there is regrettably a great need to repeat our utter condemnation of racism and anti-Semitism". Accordingly, any violence against a place of worship is also to be condemned.

In the face of these undeniable signs of anti-Semitism, I also felt the need to express my position and, on 7 September 2003, I published an article in "L'Osservatore Romano", entitled: "Anti-Semitism: a wound to be healed". In this article I highlighted the common roots of Judaism and Christianity, and the need to continue our dialogue and co-operation.

Mr. Chairman,

In Berlin we shall also discuss the role of education in the fight against anti-Semitism.

As is demonstrated by the Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops, published on 9 March last by the Congregation for Bishops, this issue remains high on the agenda of the Holy See. The aforementioned document requests all Catholic Bishops to promote an attitude of respect towards these "elder brothers" and to ensure that sacred ministers receive an adequate formation concerning Judaism and its relation with Christianity.

As one of the positive outcomes of the Pope's visit to the Holy Land, the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews started an official dialogue with the Great Rabbinate in Israel two years ago. The latest meeting took place at the beginning of December 2003 in Jerusalem. Its joint declaration explicitly emphasizes that religious education can and must provide hope and direction for positive living in human solidarity and harmony in our complex modern times. Educational institutions in both Catholic and Jewish communities should make every effort, as appropriate to their particular context, to expose students to an objective knowledge and respect for the other community's belief.

For this purpose, the understanding of Jewish reality and tradition and co-operation with Jewish communities is increasingly present in catechesis and in the training and further education of future priests.

Likewise, Governments and civil authorities should educate their citizens in a similar way.

In this regard, I wish to stress that information concerning these questions is important, at all levels. Among the sources of information, special attention should be devoted to history books, mass media and the internet.

One must also keep in mind that obstacles to a calm and objective view of anti-Semitism arise not only from disinformation, but also from prejudice and generalizations regarding historic, cultural, political and religious themes related to it, which may bring about hasty opinions on issues that although connected to it, are different from it.

The combat against anti-Semitism means fighting for human rights and promoting peace. In this regard the item is rightly placed on the OSCE agenda. Those who are seated around this table are well aware that whoever loves peace cannot be restrained by prejudice of any kind, nor by incomplete or superficial judgements. Justice would not be served and consequently a solution to this problem would not be provided; indeed it would be made all the more difficult.

So as to make the commitment against anti-Semitism effective, I believe that it is important above all to stress that the question is not merely to uproot from citizens and cultures the possibly existing feelings of anti-Semitism, but rather to arouse through educational work a serene evaluation of the problem and a sense of respect for Jewish communities. The ongoing commitment to promote a culture of acceptance of the other by those who are marked by generational memories of anti-Semitic oppression are also decisive for properly addressing the problems linked with anti-Semitism.

To use an expression taken from the Prophet Zephaniah (cf. 3:9) one could say that Christians, Jews and Muslims in the present international context should, on the operative level, serve the Lord

“shoulder to shoulder” if they seriously intend to contribute to the establishment of peace and justice in this world.

I entrust these considerations to the Delegations of the participating States with the fervent hope that they will contribute to the success of the noble ambitions for which this Conference has been convoked.