



PC.DEL/1046/07  
1 November 2007

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 685<sup>th</sup> MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

**1 NOVEMBER 2007**

**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**

Mr. Chairman,

1. The Holy See also joins other Delegations in warmly 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 attaches 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 all forms of religious intolerance and discrimination is well known. Here, it is sufficient to recall the words that Pope Benedict XVI addressed to the Heads of Delegations at the "XXI International Meeting for Peace", held in Naples, Italy on October 21, 2007 and dedicated to the topic: "For a world without violence: Religions and culture in dialogue: *"While respecting the differences of the various religions, we are all called to work for peace and to be effectively committed to furthering reconciliation among peoples. This is the true "spirit of Assisi" which opposes every form of violence and the abuse of religion as a pretext for violence. In the face of a world torn apart by conflicts, where violence in God's Name is at times justified, ...religions can and must offer precious resources to build a peaceful humanity, because they speak of peace to the human heart."*

3. A recent reference manual defined anti-Christian discrimination, anti-Christian prejudice, Christianophobia or Christophobia thus: “a negative categorical bias against Christians or the religion of Christianity. Such prejudice and discrimination is a type of religious intolerance and a form of religious discrimination. Anti-Christian prejudice can be held by individuals or groups, and may be the result of religious or antireligious fanaticism or bigotry. Anti-Christian discrimination is practiced by members of other religions, as well as antireligious adherents of secularism.”

Is there any real evidence of intolerance and discrimination against Christians? In a survey conducted six months ago by the British Broadcasting Corporation’s “Heaven and Earth” programme, 33 per cent of Christians interviewed thought that the way they are portrayed in the media amounts to discrimination. And 25 per cent said they also experienced discrimination from colleagues in the workplace when their faith was known or talked about. Another 22 per cent said they thought Christians faced discrimination in their local community, while 19 per cent said they would be passed over for promotion. One third thought the media distorted Christian issues.

Archbishop Chrysostomos, the Head of the Orthodox Church in Cyprus, participated in the recent International Meeting for Peace in Naples. There, he spoke of the fact that in the geographical area covered by the OSCE churches and other Christian places of cult have been converted into stalls or restaurants. He related the episode that recently, in one of those churches, the distribution of communion, a most sacred moment for Christians, was interrupted by the entry of forces of order into the church itself. He also lamented that masterpieces of Christian art have been desecrated or destroyed.

In a European Capital that I recently visited on my way to a Conference, there is an exhibit entitled “The Evil Empire”, a video animation of the Italo-American Federico Solmi. Its content is “x-rated.” It portrays a Pope, Urban LXIX, hypothetical successor to Saint Peter, who, in the year 2046, cannot avoid the temptations of virtual sex. Urban is portrayed with evil eyes and the dentures of a pirana, and he is seen flying above Saint Peter’s Square as “superman.” He is then shown entering the Basilica of Saint Peter and engaging in sex acts with numerous nuns and even with a sheep, while priests and monks appear on the scene who engage in acts of self-stimulation before this fictitious Pope.

At the risk of being flagged by the competent authorities, I viewed a portion of this video on the internet at a popular video image site. I was not only offended; I was disgusted. These feelings were not in the least dissipated when later on I read some comments by the organizers of the exhibit. They justified the inclusion of the video by stating that proper precautions were in place and that the “x-rated” content of the video could not be viewed by children under a certain age, as a guard was stationed outside the room to prevent them from entering!

In yet another European country, a self-confessed atheist artist has recently painted an image of the prophet Mohammed in the form of a dog. This is offensive and blasphemous for Muslim believers, a judgement I fully share. But just as startling and offensive was the reaction of the artist himself to criticism of this work: he stated that he

treats all groups equally, as he has also painted an image of Jesus Christ as a pedophile!

Mister Chairman,

Anti-Semitism, discrimination against Muslims and discrimination against Christians cannot be placed in a sort of hierarchical order, Each of these ills sickens and degrades humanity and must be properly cured. In order to avoid eventual reticence or unjustified selective actions on the part of Member States, a correct balance must be ensured between the commitments adopted by them. To this end, my Delegation proposes that, next year, one of the Supplementary Human Dimension Meetings be dedicated to the topic of religious freedom, possibly with an emphasis on intolerance against religious believers.. Religious freedom and respect for human dignity are among the core values of Helsinki and of this Organization. Such a Conference could even help us to understand better that in the increasingly a-religious world, there is also an increasing insensitivity about offence and intolerance in matters of religion. To put it simply, we are no longer even aware that we are offending others.

**4.** Furthermore, it is well known that the Holy See is among those participating States opposed to broadening the commitments undertaken by this Organization to the issue of sexual orientation. This is not included in agreed language of the OSCE and its inclusion would also weaken the specific contribution of the OSCE in the promotion of tolerance and non-discrimination.

The Holy See encourages the Personal Representative of the Chairman-in-Office on Combating Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination, also Focusing on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians and Members of Other Religions to continue to devote specific attention and develop effective proposals to address the above-mentioned phenomena against Christians. These are core aspects of the mandate of the Representative, as it was made clear in the negotiations that brought to its institution.

**5.** And finally, Mister Chairman, my Delegation wishes all the best to the three Personal Representatives of the Chairman-in-Office in the exercise of their mandate which may yet be of help in the struggle for what concerns us all. In this regard, it is important to recall that a decision on their status needs to be taken during the upcoming Madrid Ministerial. My Delegation hopes that there will be a serious discussion of the matter before that time.

Thank you, Mister Chairman.