

ENGLISH TRANSLATION**THE HOLY SEE**

Statement of H.E. Bishop Mario Toso, SDB
Head of the Delegation of the Holy See
to the High-Level Meeting of the OSCE on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination
Astana, Kazakhstan, 29-30 June 2010

Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims

Mr. President,

The Holy See conveys its appreciation for the important work of the OSCE/ODIHR in combating intolerance and discrimination against Muslims. The commitment of this distinguished international organization in this regard has been effective in raising the awareness of the serious problem of such intolerance, and the incidents of violence perpetrated against persons, property and places of worship which all-too-often flow from it. Policies and programs have been put in place that are now helping to stem such incidents and to create societies where peaceful co-existence among peoples of different religions and cultures is a more hopeful reality. The commitment of the OSCE/ODHIR is a recognition of the fact that combating racism is a necessary and indispensable prerequisite for the construction of governance, sustainable development, social justice, democracy, and peace in the world. Yet, we know, too, that although laws and international agreements to protect the rights of victims of intolerance and discrimination are essential, they will not ultimately be effective without a change of heart.¹ To this end, education, inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue play an irreplaceable role in rescuing individuals, as well as civil and religious groups alike from ideological distortions which fail to recognize the equal and inherent dignity of every person, and in all-too-many instances contribute to a culture of violence and conflict among peoples.

Inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue cannot be reduced to an optional extra. It is in fact a vital necessity, on which in large measure our future depends. In a world marked by relativism and too often excluding the transcendence and universality of reason, we are in great need of an authentic dialogue between religions and between cultures, capable of assisting us, in spirit of fruitful cooperation, to overcome all the tensions together; a dialogue that is based ever more on reciprocal knowledge which, with joy, recognizes the religious values that we have in common and, with loyalty, respects the differences.²

The Holy See continues to be concerned about incidents of violence, intolerance and discrimination perpetrated against Muslim communities within the OSCE region, and recognizes the need for Christians and Muslims to learn how to work together, as indeed they already do in many common undertakings, in order to guard against all forms of intolerance and to oppose all manifestations of

¹ Cfr. Silvano Tomasi, *United Nations Conference on Racism (Durban II)*, Geneva, 22 April 2009.

² Cfr. Benedict XVI, *Address to the Ambassadors of Countries with a Muslim Majority attached to the Holy See*, Castel Gandolfo, September 2006.

violence. Religious authorities and political leaders alike must guide and encourage them in this direction. The lessons of the past must help the human family to seek paths of reconciliation, in order to live with respect for the dignity and freedom of each individual. To be sure, however, respect and dialogue require reciprocity in all spheres, especially in that which concerns basic freedoms, and more particularly, religious freedom.³ The Catholic Church teaches that in order to live together in peace, all forms of racial prejudice are to be seen as harmful to the common dignity of every person created in the image of God, and to the development of a just and welcoming society. This teaching is embedded in the program of formation and education in every Catholic school throughout the world. It is put into practice daily by men and women who serve in the vast network of Catholic institutions wherein the hungry are fed, the sick are healed and cared for, and where the poor have the Good News preached to them. Likewise, apostolic visits by the Supreme Pontiffs to predominately Muslim countries, and diplomatic efforts by the Holy See have not failed to stress the need for governments and people of good will to:

- (1) help to defend the right of every people to choose freely its own destiny, in accordance with the principle of self-determination;
- (2) foster mutual understanding, dialogue between individuals and communities of believers in countries where religion and the structure of society go hand in hand;
- (3) make everyone understand that violence can never be a worthy means for people, especially if they are believers, to resolve their inevitable differences;
- (4) never consider the other person an enemy to attack or someone to convert in a coercive manner;
- (5) promote the equality of rights and treatment for those belonging to religious communities, in the context of the freedom of their spiritual, cultural, civic and economic activities;

In conclusion, Pope Benedict XVI, during his recent visit to Cyprus, recalled that “from a religious perspective, we are members of a single human family created by God, and we are called to foster unity and to build a more just and fraternal world based on lasting values. Insofar as we fulfill our duty, serve others and adhere to what is right, our minds become more open to deeper truths and our freedom grows strong in its allegiance to what is good.”⁴

Thank you, Mr. President.

³ Cfr. John Paul II, *Address to Young People at Casablanca in Morocco*, 1985.

⁴ Benedict XVI, *Address to Civil Authorities and Diplomats*, Cyprus, June 5, 2010.