



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

**STATEMENT BY MONSIGNOR MICHAEL W. BANACH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE HOLY SEE,
AT THE 833rd MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

4 NOVEMBER 2010

**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**

Mister Chairperson,

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 formation of the human race.

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

There is no place in the modern world for anti-Semitism. In his historic visit to the Synagogue of Rome on January 17, 2010, Pope Benedict XVI said: *“Here in this place, how could we not remember the Roman Jews who were snatched from their homes, before these very walls, and who with tremendous brutality were killed at Auschwitz? How could one ever forget their faces, their names, their tears, the desperation faced by these men, women and children? The extermination of the people of the Covenant of Moses, at first announced, then systematically programmed and put into practice in Europe under the Nazi regime, on that day tragically reached as far as Rome. Unfortunately, many remained indifferent, but many...sustained by their faith and by Christian teaching, reacted with courage, often at risk of their lives, opening their arms to assist the Jewish fugitives who were being hunted down, and earning perennial gratitude. The Apostolic See itself provided assistance, often in a hidden and discreet way. The memory of these events compels us to strengthen the bonds that unite us so that our mutual understanding, respect and acceptance may always increase.”*

The Catholic Church has irrevocably committed itself to pursue the path of dialogue, fraternity and friendship between the Catholic community and our Jewish brothers and sisters, a journey which has been deepened and developed in the last forty years, through important steps and significant gestures. The progress made in this important relationship is in no small part due to the work of the International Committee for Catholic-Jewish Relations and, in more recent years, by the Mixed Commission of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel and of the Holy See, which have worked together in discovering anew a common spiritual patrimony, to keep open the space for dialogue, for reciprocal respect, for growth in friendship, and for a common witness in the face of the challenges of our time, which invite us to cooperate for the good of humanity.

3. 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 intolerance and to oppose manifestations of 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.

In this sense, during his June 2010 Visit to Cyprus, Pope Benedict XVI, 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. 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 September 2010 Meeting with Representatives of British Society, including the Diplomatic Corps, Politicians, Academics and Business Leaders in Westminster Hall, Pope Benedict XVI stated: *“Religion...is not a problem for legislators to solve, but a vital contributor to the national conversation. In this light, I cannot but voice my concern at the increasing marginalization of religion, particularly of Christianity, that is taking place in some quarters, even in nations which place a great emphasis on tolerance. There are those who would advocate that the voice of religion be silenced, or at least relegated to the purely private sphere. There are those who argue that the public celebration of festivals such as Christmas should be discouraged, in the questionable belief that it might somehow offend those of other religions or none. And there are those who argue – paradoxically with the intention of eliminating discrimination – that Christians in public roles should be required at times to act against their conscience. These are worrying signs of a failure to appreciate not only the rights of believers to freedom of conscience and freedom of religion, but also the legitimate role of religion in the public square. I would invite all of you, therefore, within your respective spheres of influence, to seek ways of promoting and encouraging dialogue between faith and reason at every level of national life”*.

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. Participating States of the OSCE have committed themselves to fight against discrimination and intolerance against Christians. What came out clearly from the Round Table discussion in March 2009 is that intolerance and discrimination against Christians is manifested in various forms across the OSCE area.

In spite of the commitments undertaken by member States of the OSCE in the area of religious freedom, in some countries intolerant and even discriminatory laws, decisions and behavior, either by action or omission, which deny this freedom, still exist against the Church and Christian communities, and against other religious communities, as well as their respective members. There are recurring episodes of violence and even killings against Christian believers. Undue restrictions remain against the registration of Churches and religious communities, as well as against the importation and distribution of their religious materials. There are also illegitimate interferences in the area of their organizational autonomy, preventing them from acting consistently with their own moral convictions. At times undue pressure is brought to bear upon people working in public administration in contrast with their freedom to behave in accordance with the dictates of their own conscience. At times civic education is deficient in duly respecting the identity

and principles of Christians and of members of other religions, and there are clear signs of resistance against the recognition of religion's public role.

Nor are the media and public discourse always free from attitudes of intolerance and, sometimes, of actual denigration of Christians and members of other religions.

5. In the light of the above-mentioned abuses, the OSCE should devote specific attention and develop effective proposals to fight intolerance and discrimination against Christians. 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 the three 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 continued concerted effort of the three Personal Representatives has shown that the agreed commitments of the OSCE are strong and noble, and are supported by a stable mandate and the principle of consensus. The Holy See reaffirms these commitments, and encourages this Organization to remain focused on them, so as to guarantee the effectiveness and efficiency of the OSCE into the future.

6. I would also like to thank the Delegation of Morocco for the expression of condolences and nearness to the families of the victims of last Sunday's senseless killing and wounding of worshippers participating in the liturgy at Our Lady of Salvation Syrian-Catholic Cathedral in Baghdad.

7. In conclusion, my Delegation wishes all the best to the three Personal Representatives of the Chairman-in-Office. In the exercise of their mandate they may yet be of help in the struggle for what concerns us all.

Thank you, Mister Chairperson.