



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

**19 MARCH 2009**

**RE: REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE FOR  
DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman!

1. The Delegation of the Holy See willingly joins the previous speakers in warmly welcoming to the Permanent Council the Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), Ambassador Janez Lenarčič, and thanks him for his report – a veritable *tour de horizon* of the activities not only of his first 262 days in office but also for the upcoming year.

The Holy See has always followed with particular interest and attention the activities of ODIHR and desires that they effectively contribute not only to the creation of a culture of the rule of law, but also to the promotion of human rights and democracy.

2. My Delegation notes with satisfaction the efforts of the ODIHR to promote respect for the human rights of the Roma and Sinti populations. In fact, international organizations and governments must respect the rights and dignity of these people. Commitments must be made to eradicate existing episodes of racism and xenophobia which lead to discrimination in Roma and Sinti's gaining employment, housing and having access to education. Roma and Sinti represent a unique minority because they do not have a country of origin that would be able

to give them the support that they need. A lack of clear citizenship often dangers solid political guarantees and adequate civil protection. To ensure that Roma and Sinti's human rights are protected, the ODIHR has much to offer to help national governments to forge even better a common, global and shared policy for pulling these populations out from poverty and restrictions. To this end, the HDIM 2009 Special Day on Early Education for Roma and Sinti Children is most welcome.

3. Human trafficking is fundamentally a human rights problem that requires an equally multi-dimensional response of prevention, education and awareness, assistance to victims, and professional development. The Holy See remains deeply concerned about this problem in the human family and is pleased to note the recent continuing efforts of the ODIHR in this regard. Acknowledging the right to compensation for victims, and the creation of compensation schemes; the punishment of individuals and groups who exploit victims, including the confiscation of profits and property obtained through trafficking activities; the adoption of legislation and consequently enforcement, including workplace inspections; further reflection on macro-economic measures, and the implementation of policies which allow third country nationals to enter countries and work, according to the demand of labor in that country, must all be part and parcel of ongoing efforts to combat trafficking in persons.

4. In the area of tolerance, the Holy See is equally pleased to note the recent efforts of the ODIHR in the area of the promotion of tolerance and non-discrimination in the "religious" sphere. The question of the peaceableness of cultures, of peace in matters of religion, is a political and security theme of the first rank. The recent Round Table on Combating Anti-Semitism has called attention to some alarming trends. It is obvious that Anti-Semitism cannot be limited to the Holocaust. Nevertheless, the hatred and contempt for men, women and children that was manifested in the *Shoah* was a crime against God and against humanity. It is beyond question that any denial or minimization of this terrible crime is intolerable and altogether unacceptable. Anti-Semitism must serve as warning for all, for violence committed against one single human being is violence against all.

December's Round Table on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination Against Muslims emphasized that all of us must learn to

work together in order to guard against intolerance and to oppose all manifestations of violence. Religious authorities and political leaders must guide and encourage their followers and constituents in this direction. The Catholic Church also deplores that crimes have been committed which offend God and humanity and throw discredit on Islam. We should hold firm to a basic principle of this Organization that rejects the *“identification of terrorism with any nationality or religion”*.

Above all, Madam Chairwoman, my Delegation appreciates the efforts of the ODIHR in organizing the first ever OSCE Round Table on Intolerance and Discrimination Against Christians. Focusing on Exclusion, Marginalization and Denial of Rights. As Ambassador Lenarčič himself stated in his concluding remarks on that day: “What came out clearly from this meeting is that intolerance and discrimination against Christians is manifested in various forms across the OSCE area. While denial of rights may be an important issue where Christians form a minority, exclusion and marginalization may also be experienced by Christians where they comprise a majority in society.” My Delegation looks forward to pursuing some of the recommendations that emerged as a result of the lively and substantive discussions.

**5.** The promotion of tolerance and non-discrimination in matters of religion is related to, but distinct from, fundamental rights and freedoms. I realize that I am painting in broad strokes but, generally speaking, tolerance and non-discrimination deal with perceptions and stereotypes in society while fundamental freedoms deal with basic human rights. The freedom of religion and belief is such a right: it is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and forms one of the OSCE core commitments. My Delegation encourages the ODIHR to continue its work in this area. We are ready to help in the preparation of the second 2009 Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting, as well as in participating in it.

**6.** The topic of fundamental rights and freedoms leads me to state that, more in general, as far as the ODIHR’s tolerance and non-discrimination program is concerned, the Holy See counts itself among those participating States who desire to see a commitment of more focused energy and efforts to fulfil the clearly defined and agreed upon OSCE commitments. In its activities, the ODIHR should avoid giving the impression that there is a political consensus where there is not. Any

other approach will only serve to weaken our Organization by detracting attention from its core principles – equally valid today just as they were in 1975 and 1989. The question of focusing ever more our attention on core commitments becomes all the more urgent in this time of dwindling financial and economic resources.

7. In conclusion, Madam Chairwoman, I would like to assure the Director of the ODIHR of the full co-operation of the Delegation of the Holy See and renew the wish for every success in carrying out the mandate entrusted to him by our Organization.

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman