



**STATEMENT OF THE HOLY SEE
AS DELIVERED BY MSGR. JANUSZ URBAŃCZYK,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE HOLY SEE,
AT THE SUPPLEMENTARY HUMAN DIMENSION MEETING
ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF:
FOSTERING MUTUAL RESPECT AND UNDERSTANDING**

Vienna, 3 July 2015

Session III:

Advancing Freedom of Religion or Belief and fostering mutual respect and understanding through dialogue and cooperation between authorities, religious and belief communities and civil society.

Madam Moderator,

During my delegation's interventions in the previous two sessions of this meeting, freedom of religion or belief has been highlighted as being of central, not secondary, importance to the whole framework of the human dimension. The Holy See has identified as counterproductive heavy-handed approaches to implementing participating States' commitments to promote freedom of religion or belief where these seek to condition that right, circumscribe the terms, timing or agenda of inter-religious dialogue or undermine religious freedom to express legitimate diversity of opinion or belief by dictating that dialogue may only proceed according to values prioritised by the State authorities themselves.

In this final session, my delegation wishes to appeal to participating States to join in this important process of cooperation and dialogue with religious groupings as constructive agents of mutual respect and understanding. This requires that participating States resist reductionist notions of religious freedom, avoid the temptation to merge religious belief with State interests or to set them necessarily at odds with one another, as well as the temptation to misuse occasions of cooperation or dialogue to seek to impose a specific agenda on autonomous religious groups. The distinction between religious and civil interests does not entail estrangement, indifference and incommunicability, but dialogue and sharing at the service of the authentic good of the human person. Addressing the diversity of convictions behind religious belief is essential to meaningful dialogue and participating States should ensure the free expression of such convictions, even through the mass media, even where these address legislative and administrative provisions in their countries.¹

In the first place, this requires that occasions of dialogue be freed from the encumbrances of politics. For their part, religious groups need to overcome the politics of self-interest antithetical to the very nature of religious belief and educate their own members to a vision of the transcendental commonality shared with others to make them capable of

¹ Principle 16, Vienna 1989 Concluding Document & Ministerial Council decision No. 3/13.

meaningful dialogue which can advance peace and security in society. Secondly, for the contributions of religion to be able to enrich public policy it is necessary for authorities to pursue a dialectic of complementarity which better values legitimate diversity in religious belief without attempting either to whittle these down to a lowest common denominator or to suppress or ignore them. Recognising the proper role that religions play in intercultural dialogue and maintaining with religions an open and transparent dialogue is important even from a merely political point of view.

Attempts, however, to eclipse the role of religion in public life represent not only a reductive notion of the nature of the human person, but also stifle the development of authentic peace and almost certainly will bring about a less just society. Defending a transcendent vision of human dignity that goes beyond the merely immanent and material dimension serves to safeguard the common good of believers and non-believers alike and establishes the basis on which those with the least voice in society are themselves defended by such a vision.

A correct understanding of the nature of freedom of religion or belief appreciates that this pinnacle of human freedom is an inalienable right rooted in the transcendent dignity of the human person which can never be superseded by apparently competing rights. It includes, on both an individual and collective level, not only so-called “freedom of worship” but also the freedom to follow one’s conscience in religious matters and the freedom to live coherently by manifesting one’s views in public. Participating States’ commitments to pursue freedom of religion or belief certainly includes the duty adequately to protect public manifestations of such religious belief.

In conclusion, we are hopeful that the outcome of this meeting will contribute to laying the foundations for participating States to recognize that freedom of religion or belief extends also to professing those beliefs both in public and in the environment of the family, allowing parents to exercise fully their rights to “ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions”. Moreover, that religions and beliefs are granted the freedom to determine and develop their beliefs as is guaranteed not only by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights², but also in the Helsinki Final Act.

Thank you Madam Moderator.

² Article 18: “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance”.