



**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, 2 July 2015

Opening session

Mr. Chair,

Allow me to express the gratitude of the Holy See Delegation to the OSCE Serbian Chairmanship, to ODIHR and to all those who have contributed to the organization of today's event.

As is pointed out in the Annotated Agenda for this meeting, the commitment to implement the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, and the fostering of understanding and mutual respect to assist the implementation of these commitments, are among the original tenets of the OSCE.

The Holy See supports the essential value of these principles and also recognizes the sad reality that, again as noted in the Agenda: "The right to freedom of religion or belief has been under increasing pressure in various parts of the OSCE area in recent years; growing instances of violations of freedom of religion or belief... as well as religious intolerance and discrimination continue to leave their mark on societies and threaten the long-term security of the region". In this respect it should be noted and underlined that violations of freedom of religion or belief may escalate in wider violence and instability, affecting the peaceful relations among the States. Therefore early warning plays an essential role in order to guarantee the security and stability of the OSCE area.

OSCE participating States do not consider governments and non-governmental organisations on a par with religious communities, in this regard, but recognise the latter's unique character amidst other actors in civil society (including associations of non-believers). Such a unique feature of religious communities is, for example, well highlighted by Article 17 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, which provides that "*recognising their identity and their specific contribution, the Union shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue*" with churches and religious societies or communities.

The Holy See considers the promotion of religious freedom a priority of its international commitments. The Holy See has concluded agreements with State actors

which, historically and in fact, have gone a long way towards advancing religious freedom. To this end, my Delegation invites closer cooperation between governments and the religious and faith communities concerned in advancing the full implementation of this right and offers its own continued willingness to be at the service of this important objective.

All religions have an essential role to play in the construction of democratic societies that are genuinely inclusive. Understanding the meaning of this role is a sign of political wisdom on the part of States and international organisations.

In conclusion, we wish to stress that greater awareness and need for participating States and non-State actors 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”. Strengthening freedom of religion and belief through actions that can foster mutual respect and understanding is another key stone of a peaceful and coherent OSCE region. We are hopeful that this meeting will offer a precious contribution to that end.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman!