



**THE HOLY SEE**  
**2016 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting**  
*Working Session 6: Fundamental freedoms – address by OSCE RFoM*  
**Thursday, 22 September 2016**

Mr. Moderator,

The Holy See – in a world that is rapidly changing and where information and communication is playing an increasingly decisive role – is convinced that “the information provided by the media is at the service of the common good. Society has a right to information based on truth, freedom, justice and solidarity.”<sup>1</sup> This very idea was expressed also by the Ministerial Council Decisions at the meetings of Brussels and Madrid, which in unison recalled that “the recognition of the essential role that the free and independent media can play in democratic societies and the strong influence it can have in countering or exacerbating misconceptions and prejudices.”

Therefore, our Delegation is pleased that the activities of the OSCE human dimension continue to engage with the Representative on Freedom of the Media.

To advance truth, freedom, justice and solidarity in the society it serves, the media – of whatever form – must be protected and allotted that freedom that the international community has recognized. At the same time, there needs to be, on the part of the media, recognition that freedom of the media is a particular manifestation of the human right *freedom of expression*, and that, as with every human right, comes responsibilities that cannot be ignored. Any consideration of the freedom of the media needs, therefore, to take into account the professional and ethical standards that any self-respecting media outlet or journalist is bound by, and would feel duty-bound to uphold. What goes beyond those limits may not be considered a freedom but rather a breach or misuse of freedom. Moreover, my Delegation wishes to highlight the importance of the inclusion of religious communities in public dialogue, even through the mass media, according to Principle 16 of the 1989 Vienna Concluding Document and Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/13.

Therefore, the media have the responsibility to promote knowledge and understanding of religions, to give a fair and accurate account of religious beliefs and to ensure that members of religious communities, are given the chance to express their own views.

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<sup>1</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2494; cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree *Inter Mirifica*, 11: AAS 56 (1964), 148-149.

Special attention should be paid to the Internet, and especially to social networks, which play a leading role in spreading disparagement of, or incitement against religions and religious communities, as well as in promoting irreverent treatment or provocative portrayal of religious symbols. Internet service providers and social networking services should be encouraged to adopt standard form contracts providing termination clauses and penalties in case of intolerant behaviour of people using their services.

In closing, the relationship between freedom of expression and freedom of media, on the one hand, and the freedom of religion or belief on the other, is of the utmost importance to the Holy See. Freedom of religion or belief as such does not include the right for one's religion or belief to be immune from any criticism or all adverse comment, and most faith communities would and should welcome open and honest discussion and analysis of religious issues in the media. However, the freedom of the media, or some distorted notion of the freedom of expression, cannot be used as a cover for those whose only desire is to incite immediate discrimination, hostility or violence against a religion or its members.

Thank you, Mr. Moderator.