



THE HOLY SEE
2013 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
*Working Session 4: Fundamental Freedoms I. Freedom of expression,
free media and information*
Wednesday, September 25, 2013

Mr. Moderator,

My Delegation has always expressed its strong support for freedom of expression and the free exchange of ideas. Freedom to seek and know the truth is one of the basic human rights, while freedom of expression is a keystone of democracy. Strengthening the principles and practices of a free and professional media is the most sustainable way of encouraging a media culture that works towards building peace. Only a media that is vibrant, fair, editorially free and beyond censorship and influence from owners or interests can contribute to dialogue and reconciliation across divides.

By challenging prevailing attitudes and stereotypes about other cultures, religions and peoples, the media can help to strip away the ignorance that breeds mistrust and suspicion, thus promoting tolerance and an acceptance of difference that values diversity as an opportunity for understanding. We must strengthen our efforts to build a media that is critical of inherited assumptions yet tolerant of alternative perspectives; a media that provides the information that enables people to make well-informed decisions; a media that brings competing narratives into a shared story of interdependence; a media that responds to diversity through dialogue.

Authentic press freedom and freedom of expression worldwide is certainly a prerequisite of free societies. Hence, a free press is not a luxury that can wait until more peaceful or appropriate times. It is, rather, part of the very process through which other freedoms may be achieved.

Mr. Moderator,

Seen from an ethical viewpoint, freedom of expression and freedom of the media are not absolute. There are obvious instances—for example, libel and slander, messages that seek to foster hatred and conflict among individuals and groups, obscenity and pornography, the morbid depiction of violence—where no right to communicate exists. Plainly, too, free expression should always observe principles like truth, fairness, and respect for privacy. Professional communicators should be actively involved in developing and enforcing ethical codes of behavior for their profession, in cooperation with public representatives. Religious bodies and other groups likewise

deserve to be part of this continuing effort. Precisely because contemporary media shape popular culture, they themselves must overcome any temptation to manipulate, especially the young, and instead pursue the desire to form and serve. In this way they protect, rather than erode, the fabric of a civil society worthy of the human person.

Mr. Moderator,

The culture of social networks and changes in the means and styles of communication pose demanding challenges to those who want to speak about truth and values. Often, as is also the case with other means of social communication, the significance and effectiveness of the various forms of expression appear to be determined more by their popularity than by their intrinsic importance and value. Popularity, for its part, is often linked to celebrity or to strategies of persuasion rather than to the logic of argumentation. At times the voice of reason can be overwhelmed by the din of excessive information and it fails to attract attention which is given instead to those who express themselves in a more persuasive manner. The social media thus need the commitment of all who are conscious of the value of dialogue, reasoned debate and logical argumentation; of people who strive to cultivate forms of discourse and expression which appeal to the noblest aspirations of those engaged in the communication process. Dialogue and debate can also flourish and grow when we converse with and take seriously people whose ideas are different from our own. Given the reality of cultural and religious diversity, people need not only to accept the existence of the culture of others, but also to aspire to be enriched by it and to offer to it whatever they possess that is good, true and beautiful.

Mr. Moderator,

My Delegation would also wish to express some concerns in regards of freedom of expression which we propose to all for further consideration. While public mocking of founders of religions, religious leaders, communities, individuals and their faiths is often seen and defended as free expression of various kinds, on the other hand there are laws in the OSCE area that state “whoever publicly mocks ... those who do not profess any religion or belief may be committing a crime”. While we reject any deliberate mockery, we cannot remain silent in front of already regular humiliation of believers justified by freedom of others to express themselves. As we know all freedoms have their limits, therefore appropriate measures should be undertaken to prevent that people of faith are mercilessly and without consequences exposed to hate and intolerance protected and justified by the right of free expression.

Thank you, Mr. Moderator!