



STATEMENT OF THE HOLY SEE
2018 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

Working Session 6: Tolerance and non-discrimination I, including combating anti-Semitism, combating intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief, including against Christians, Muslims and members of other religions
Warsaw, 13 September 2018

As delivered by Monsignor Fredrik Hansen

Madam Moderator,

No part of the OSCE region, from Vancouver to Vladivostok, is immune from acts of intolerance and discrimination against Christians, including hate crimes. Threats and violent attacks against Christians, resulting sometimes even in murder, are common both to the East and West of Vienna, while the profanation of Christian churches, cemeteries and other properties is a not infrequent reality in the entire OSCE area. These phenomena, which give rise to a sense of insecurity, have a negative impact on the daily lives of Christians, individuals and communities, and their enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms. They also threaten the social cohesion inside participating States.

The starting point for the development of any response to hate crimes and incidents against Christians should be the recognition that they are a shared concern. While their strongest impact is on the lives of Christians, the problem needs to be recognized and addressed by our societies as a whole, rather than simply by the targeted community. Wherever any religious community is persecuted and marginalized because of its religious beliefs, the well-being of society is endangered and each one of us is diminished. Moreover, we should always bear in mind that Christians are targeted both in countries where they are a minority as well as those in which they represent the majority. Therefore, all attacks should be given equal attention, irrespective of whether they are directed at the majority or minority group.

Our efforts to prevent and combat intolerance and non-discrimination on religious grounds cannot be considered apart from the longstanding OSCE commitments on freedom of religion or belief: a certain misconceived notion of “tolerance” cannot be an excuse for denying or not guaranteeing religious freedom.

Elements of anti-discrimination legislation in some participating States seem to be in contrast with the relevant OSCE commitments, because such legislation does not take into consideration and ensure the autonomy of Christian communities, preventing them from organizing themselves and acting in accordance with their beliefs and interests. In many places Christians meet with a certain contempt, even though their faith inspires them to contribute to the common good, to build and seek out a society

that will protect the poor and the weak, educate the young and care for the sick, as well as prevent conflict and discord.

Particularly worrisome is the fact that across the OSCE region a sharp dividing line seems to have been drawn between religious belief and religious practice: Christians are frequently reminded in public discourse or even in the courts, that they can believe whatever they like in private and worship as they wish in their own churches, but they are prohibited from acting on those beliefs in public.

Especially West of Vienna, anti-Christian discrimination has become the last acceptable form of prejudice and seems to receive less attention than other forms of intolerance, in part because of Christianity's position as the historically dominant religion. In a more general way, the false idea that religions have a negative impact and represent a threat to the well-being of our democracies is ever present. According to such growing opposition to the public role of religion, actions inspired by religious belief are unwelcome in our societies. The consequence of this is that individuals are prevented from living and acting in accordance with the dictates of their conscience, a right that was recognised already by the Helsinki Final Act.

Another issue that my Delegation believes deserves increased attention is the denial of the public role of Christian Churches and the attempt to exclude Christian believers from public discourse. Not only does it deny citizens their right to participate in politics, but it can also easily slide into more overt discrimination or intolerance. According to our commitments, the OSCE and its participating States should engage in consultation with religious communities and promote the participation of these communities in public dialogue, even through the mass media. Therefore, participating States are called upon to welcome and encourage the representatives of religious communities to give their views – based on moral convictions deriving from their faith – about everyday life. But, the media and public discourse are not always free from attitudes of intolerance and, sometimes, of actual denigration of members of all religions, with Christians being the easiest target. Advocacy of “politically correct” issues all too often provides sufficient justification to label and denigrate Christians as bigoted or intolerant.

In conclusion, the root cause of discrimination and intolerance against Christians within the OSCE region may be summarized as a weakening of the freedom of religion or belief, or, to be more precise: a troubling limitation of what this fundamental freedom actually entails. Pope Francis spoke of this worrying trend when he said: *“In a world where various forms of modern tyranny seek to suppress religious freedom, or try to reduce it to a subculture without right to a voice in the public square, or to use religion as a pretext for hatred and brutality, it is imperative that the followers of the various religions join their voices in calling for peace, tolerance, and respect for the dignity and rights of others”*¹.

Thank you, Madam Moderator!

¹ POPE FRANCIS, *Address to the meeting for religious liberty with the Hispanic community and other immigrants*, Philadelphia, 26 September 2015.