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Statement of the Holy See at the twenty-first Ministerial Council of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) (Basel, Switzerland, 4 - 5 December 2014)

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Here below the Statement by H.E. Archbishop Dominique Mamberti, Secretary for the Holy See's Relations with States, at the twenty-first Ministerial Council of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) (Basel, Switzerland, 4 - 5 December 2014):

Statement by H.E. Archbishop Dominique Mamberti (4 December 2014)

The Delegation of the Holy See wishes to thank His Excellency Mr. Didier Burkhalter, President of the Swiss Confederation and Head of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, as well as the 2014 Swiss Chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) for their generous hospitality here in the historical city of Basel.

The Ministerial Council meets this year in the context of the disturbing events that undermine security in the OSCE area. The politico-military tools of the Organization designed to defuse conflicts and restore a climate of trust and confidence between the participating States have been tested in an unparalleled manner. Unfortunately, the evidence has shown that even the best tools are ineffective if there is insufficient political will to implement them in good faith.

The Holy See has been following very closely and with deep concern the worrying developments in Ukraine. The Catholic Church and the Holy Father Francis are close to those who suffer and are exposed to violations of their fundamental human rights and freedoms, in particular the right to life in dignity and without fear.

In this context, we welcome a swift reaction to the outbreak of violence, in particular, by deploying the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission. On the other hand, we regret that, in spite of the valuable efforts of the Forum for Security and Co-operation, the non-implementation of other valuable tools that our Organization possesses, such as the Vienna Document or the Code of Conduct, has prevented the emergence of the conditions necessary for the settlement of the ongoing crisis.

Even more regretful is the loss of life, physical suffering, violations of people's fundamental rights, and enormous material damage that has already affected too many Ukrainian citizens. Our prayers and thoughts of solidarity go to all the victims and to all those who are subject to grave violations of their right to live in peace.

Attempting to resolve disputes with the use of arms rather than by a sincere effort to find negotiated solutions is a sad development, as has frequently been noted by successive Popes. Pope Francis himself exclaimed in his first Message for the World Day of Peace: "I appeal forcefully to all those who sow violence and death by force of arms: in the person you today see simply as an enemy to be beaten, discover rather your brother or sister, and hold back your hand! Give up the way of arms and go out to meet the other in dialogue, pardon and reconciliation, in order to rebuild justice, trust, and hope around you!" (*Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace*, 7).

Therefore, it is our strong conviction that the best way of resolving the current situation is through dialogue and negotiation for the benefit not only of those directly involved but also for the benefit of the larger international community. There should be no hesitancy and lack of good will to use all possible means to reach a peaceful solution.

This year marks some important anniversaries. It has been 100 years since the beginning of the First World War and 75 years since the beginning of the Second World War. These anniversaries bring back memories of unprecedented suffering raging for a total of 10 years through the world and in particular across the OSCE region. The years of war were followed by decades of recovery but also by post-war divisions, prolonging uncertainty and postponing the desires of peoples and nations to live in freedom and prosperity without fear of new tragedies.

It should be seen as our moral imperative to avoid, by all possible means, the horrors and divisions of the past too often stirred up by senseless and interest-driven propaganda. Instead, no effort must be spared in building and reinforcing peace, which we all have pledged to pursue, where no one will feel threatened and where no one's freedom will be compromised.

In order to lay the foundations of common security for all, the forefathers of this Organization, gathered in Helsinki in 1975, were able to overcome seemingly irreconcilable differences for the sake of the common good. We should, therefore, seriously reflect upon that fact and rise once again above what separates us and look for what unites us. The common good of all citizens of the OSCE region, in particular those whose lives are under threat or whose rights and freedom risk being gravely compromised must become our main goal. Peace is an indivisible good. Either it is the good of all or it the good of none. Therefore, we should work towards it with determination.

Less than a month ago, the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall was also celebrated. It is not just a reminder of the end of an era of profound division; it is a symbol of hope, showing that it is possible to overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles for the benefit of what is deeply rooted in our human nature, namely life in dignity and freedom. And the fact that it was achieved in a marvelously peaceful manner makes us hopeful that it can be done again. We need bridges and not walls that will connect peoples from Vancouver to Vladivostok, spreading peace throughout the world.

The OSCE participating States have recognized and repeatedly reaffirmed that security goes beyond politico-military issues. It includes, as integral parts, issues related to the economic and environmental sphere, as well as to human rights. In fact, the OSCE has placed respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law at the very core of any effective response to security threats. It goes without saying that security cannot be achieved without the protection of human rights and, on the other hand, that full respect of human rights can be ensured only in a secure environment, allowing individuals to enjoy the inalienable rights and freedoms to which they are all entitled as human beings. We should also keep in mind that the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of human rights all serve as guarantees safeguarding inherent human dignity. (cfr. *Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI, Meeting with the members of the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization*, New York, 18 April 2008).

There is no doubt that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights and are united in one human family. Therefore the Holy See welcomes with gratitude the ongoing attention the OSCE is paying to the problem of trafficking of human persons. Indeed, "human trafficking is a crime against humanity. We must unite our efforts to free the victims and stop this increasingly aggressive crime which threatens not only individuals but the basic values of society and of international security and justice, to say nothing of the economy, and the fabric of the family and our coexistence. What is called for, then, is a shared sense of responsibility and firmer political will to gain victory on this front. Responsibility is required towards those who have fallen victim to trafficking in order to protect their rights, to guarantee their safety and that of their families, and to prevent the corrupt and criminals from escaping justice and having the last word over the lives of others." (*Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the new Ambassadors accredited to the Holy See on the occasion of the presentation of the letters of credence, 12 December 2013*).

We wish to draw particular attention to freedom of religion or belief, which lies at the heart of basic human rights. Numerous international documents recognize that the spiritual dimension of life is a vital part of human existence. Freedom of religion or belief is also a well-established constant in the OSCE documents, stretching from the Helsinki Final Act to include the Astana Summit Commemorative Declaration and the Kiev Ministerial Decision adopted at our gathering last year. The adoption of last year's decision shows that the rights associated with religion need particular protection. Let us not forget its unifying power as well, since this is where we have found a common ground after some years without reaching decisions in the human dimension. However, despite the commitments undertaken by the participating States of the OSCE in the area of religious freedom, which actually includes many other rights and freedoms, such as freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, in some countries, including countries of the OSCE region and its neighboring areas, this right is still gravely violated.

We cannot be silent in the face of tens of thousands of Christians who are persecuted and killed worldwide every year, including in areas bordering on the OSCE region. There is no doubt that these profoundly deplorable crimes, which also place the security of participating States at risk, must be strongly condemned and opposed.

In this regard, I would like to recall the words of Pope Francis who insists on the responsibility of the international community to help those who suffer persecution in the Middle East: "As I have had the occasion to reiterate several times, we cannot resign ourselves to thinking of the Middle East without Christians, who have professed the name of Jesus for 2,000 years. Recent events, mostly in Iraq and Syria, are dire. We are witnessing a phenomenon of terrorism of previously unimaginable dimensions. So many of our brothers and sisters are being persecuted and have had to leave their homes, even in a brutal manner. It seems that awareness of the value of human life has been lost. It seems that the person does not count and can be sacrificed for other interests. And all this, unfortunately, with the indifference of so many." (*Address of His Holiness Pope Francis in occasion of the Ordinary Public Consistory, 20 October 2014*).

The OSCE, its participating States and their "partners for cooperation" must raise their voice against this injustice and against the brutal violation of the rights of persons simply because of their faith. What is needed, as the Holy Father stated during his recent visit in Turkey, is a new solidarity between Muslims and Christians in the fight against terrorism and "a concerted commitment on the part of all, based on mutual trust, which can pave the way to lasting peace" (*Address of His Holiness Pope Francis during the meeting with the President of Turkey, Prime Minister and civil authorities, Ankara, 28 November 2014*). There must be a new partnership of believers and non-believers to fight anti-semitism, intolerance against Muslims and the ever growing discrimination against Christians also in Europe, where, although there is no organized persecution, there are many forms of intolerance which manifest themselves in a variety of ways, even in hate motivated crimes against persons and sacred places.

Bearing all of this in mind, we continue to insist that the full guarantee of religious freedom cannot be limited to the free exercise of worship; it must also give due consideration to the public dimension of religion and, hence, to the possibility of believers exercising their responsibility in building the social order. Every violation of religious freedom, whether explicit or subtle, does fundamental damage to the cause of peace and security.

In conclusion, I wish to renew my gratitude to the 2014 Swiss Chairmanship of the OSCE for its leadership and service, as well as to express my best wishes to the incoming Serbian Chairmanship as we work together to attain the goals, implement the common vision and work according to common values agreed upon and shared by all the participating States of the OSCE.

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