



**STATEMENT OF THE HOLY SEE
AS DELIVERED BY H.E. LUCIANO SURIANI
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO NORTH MACEDONIA**

**AT THE CLOSING SESSION OF THE
CONFERENCE ON ADDRESSING ANTI-SEMITISM IN THE OSCE REGION**

Skopje, 7 February 2023

Mr Chairman,

On behalf of the Holy See, I would like to thank the OSCE Chairmanship of North Macedonia for organizing, in consultation with the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), this *Conference on Addressing Anti-Semitism in the OSCE Region*. My Delegation's gratitude goes also to the distinguished speakers for their valuable contributions to the debate.

Reflecting on Efforts to Address Anti-Semitism across the OSCE Region

ODIHR's hate crime reports year after year provide an increasing and alarming amount of data on anti-Semitic hate crimes. Nearly all of the incidents reported to the ODIHR are anti-religious hate crimes¹. However, Anti-Semitic hate crimes (like other anti-religious hate crimes) are widely under-recorded and more numerous than indicated in the annual reporting. Therefore, more efforts should be made to improve the accuracy of data recording, in particular through data disaggregation.

The Holy See is particularly alarmed by the rising number of attacks targeting synagogues, Jewish cemeteries and other sites of the Jewish community. All "attacks on places of worship go against both the letter and spirit of the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief."² Therefore, my Delegation reiterates its support for the work done by ODIHR in order to address the security needs of Jewish communities and those of other religious communities. As noted by Pope Francis, "the protection of places of worship [...] is a duty incumbent upon the civil authorities, regardless of their political persuasion or religious affiliation."³

*Contemporary Manifestations of Anti-Semitism:
Current Challenges and Effective Ways to Address Them*

In recent years, we have noticed the increasing erosion of the freedom of Jewish people to cultivate their religious traditions and to live in accordance with the dictates of their conscience. Some of the undue limitations on the freedom of religion or belief appear to be based on the false idea that behaviours and actions motivated by religious belief should have no room in our societies. Vice versa, the Holy See is convinced that religious freedom is essential especially in a secular society, both for believers and non-believers,

¹ Cf. OSCE/ODIHR, *Press release*, 22 August 2022 (ODIHR.PR/22/22).

² OSCE/ODIHR, *Press release*, 22 August 2022 (ODIHR.PR/22/22).

³ POPE FRANCIS, *Address to the members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See*, 8 February 2021.

since it protects the most intimate realm of every single person and the identity of different religious communities living in our societies.

Another worrying trend is the trivialization, diminishment and misappropriation of the Holocaust, particularly in the context of protest against public health measures pertaining to the Covid-19 or with reference to the ongoing conflicts in the OSCE Region and beyond. The Jewish people have suffered greatly at different times and in many places, but the Holocaust was certainly the worst suffering of all. The inhumanity with which the Jews were persecuted and massacred during the Holocaust is beyond the capacity of words.⁴ Therefore, the singularity and uniqueness of the Holocaust make any form of comparison with such phenomena unacceptable.

*Looking into the Future:
Addressing Anti-Semitism in the Age of Artificial Intelligence*

Anti-Semitic expressions existed well before the digital era, but the Internet and especially the widespread use of social networks has led to a fundamental paradigm shift. In fact, anti-Semitic content on social networks has a world audience and may easily become viral due to algorithmic amplification, with a multiplier effect never experienced before. In addition, content creators can easily hide their identity, which makes it difficult for the authorities to prosecute.

The Holy See has frequently stated that freedom of expression, as every human right, comes with responsibilities that cannot be ignored. If the same rights that people have offline are to be protected online, the corresponding duties and responsibilities that people have offline must be demanded online as well.

In this context, specific attention should be paid to the role of the Internet service providers and social networking services. Codes of conduct can play a useful role, provided they are seriously intended, [...and] carry appropriate penalties for violations, including public censure. Moreover, circumstances sometimes may require State intervention⁵.

In conclusion, the Holy See wishes once more to express its gratitude to North Macedonia's OSCE Chairmanship for organizing this Conference.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.

⁴ Cfr. PONTIFICIO CONSIGLIO PER L'UNITÀ DEI CRISTIANI – COMMISSIONE PER I RAPPORTI RELIGIOSI CON L'EBRAISMO, *Noi ricordiamo: una riflessione sulla Shoah*, 16 marzo 1998, II.

⁵ Cf. Pontifical Council for Social Communications, *Ethics in Internet*, n. 16.