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Here below the Statement by the Head of the Holy See Delegation, Msr Antoine Camilleri, to the High Level Informal Meeting of the OSCE (Helsinki, 10 July 2015):

**Statement by Msr Antoine Camilleri**

Mr President,

I would like to begin by expressing the Holy See's appreciation to the Serbian Chairmanship for having organized this meeting forty years after the signing of the *Helsinki Final Act*. I also thank the Government of Finland for its warm welcome on this occasion.

The events of the forty years since 1 August 1975 have made us even more conscious of the document's importance, and how it started the "process" of the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe, a structure of rules, institutions and programs which, by perseverance and great effort, have permitted crucial decisions to be made for the benefit of persons, peoples and States.

Today as then, the Holy See continues to emphasize the value of all that has been accomplished, and to recall

that the objective of the *Final Act* is not peace in the abstract, but rather a “strategy of peace” founded on security between nations, inspired by respect for human dignity in all its dimensions and guaranteed by genuine cooperation and social solidarity. These are measures able to safeguard and promote the aspirations which unite the entire human family. The concept of this unity is rooted in the very structure of the *Final Act*, which continues today to maintain all of its effectiveness as an instrument of governance to direct the future of the process begun in Helsinki.

In the course of the long negotiations leading up to the signing of the *Final Act*, the Holy See insisted that an orderly coexistence of States, respect for borders, the banning of the use of force, the need for arms agreements and the peaceful resolution of conflict could not be separated from protecting the centrality of the human person and his or her rights. In the same way, a cooperation founded on solidarity and subsidiarity cannot be separated from an authentic respect for the natural and human environment. This is not about those obligations which governments are committed to upholding, but rather the kind of security envisaged in the *Final Act*, which is synonymous with justice and the common good.

In today’s world, we are aware that when participating States violate mutual trust, obligations assumed, respect for individual sovereignty, regard for personal freedoms, the protection of diverse ecosystems and the promotion of cultural exchanges, these violations give rise to indifference and lead to political, military and economic competition. The notion of peace developed at Helsinki is thus weakened, and we see all too clearly the effects of this: growing divisions, unresolved conflicts, widespread discrimination and inequality, but above all forms of conduct bereft of solid ethical foundations.

The Holy See, by its participation in the CSCE process, and today in the activities of the OSCE, has always worked to ensure that within international relations respect is shown for the values of faith and the inviolability of each person’s conscience, without exception. The Holy See is convinced that the dimension of belief can contribute, for both individuals and communities, to respect for freedom of thought, the search for truth, personal and social justice and the rule of law. All of these are necessary if there is to be a just relationship between citizens, institutions and States.

The challenges facing the Helsinki document today arise not only from the threat of conflicts which risk becoming ever more dangerous, but also from the promotion of fundamental rights based solely on special interests and not the broader meaning of human dignity. For the Holy See, this has been a real concern since 6 February 1973 when, in the text that would become Principle VII of the *Final Act*, it proposed the inclusion of freedom of religion and of belief so that every believer, individually or in community, could fulfil his or her spiritual, human and social aspirations.

The right to freedom of religion, which Principle VII sets as the foundation of every other human right, is an area that calls for reconsideration in the present national and international context, faced with a culture that seems to regard belief and the religious dimension as superfluous, restricting these to acts of worship or rituals permitted by civil authorities, thereby limiting their presence in the public sphere. The Helsinki process, however, teaches us that the right to seek God, and thus find in religious faith the inspiration for moral conduct, is both a freedom belonging to individuals and to communities of believers. This freedom cannot be marginalized or excluded from social life, either in the name of tolerance or out of fear of fundamentalist tendencies. Believers can be a positive resource for the life of our societies, in as much as they offer an upright conscience which can guide and ensure pluralism, democratic ideals, social cohesion, public morality and effective justice.

The opposite can engender that kind of discrimination which today also affects Christians of various denominations, and which is seen in an increasing number of actions and omissions leading to violence, exclusion and intolerance. This is the case not only with regard to individual liberties, but also the activities of structures and institutions which provide social services and contribute to the cultural life of nations. Combating intolerance and discrimination against believers calls for eliminating laws and regulations which limit the ability of religious groups to organize themselves, an ability enshrined in the *Final Act*. Such laws and regulations not only interfere with organizational aspects but also hinder them from operating in a way consistent with their proper moral vision.

Mr President,

The Holy See hereby reaffirms its willingness to support those individuals, peoples and States which, over the last several decades, have been inspired by the *Helsinki Principles* and seek guarantees to their existence, based on decisions made in these past years. Territorial integrity, respect for different cultures as well as those of minorities, and the safeguarding of fundamental rights, including religious freedom, must not merely be goals, but need to be implemented in their entirety.

In Helsinki, on 1 August 1975, the way was paved towards an institutionalized form of cooperation, capable of responding to the needs not of an imaginary “new Europe”, but of all those, Europeans and non-Europeans alike, who live on this Continent or who come here either by choice or constrained by circumstances. Today this heritage must be at the centre of the work of the *Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe*. More than ever, this *Organization* must be an example of encounter between different realities and the expression of that desire for unity among countries called to live together in a geopolitical space which, from its original area extending from Vancouver to Vladivostok, is now called to expand beyond southernmost Europe, not out of a passive response to the migration movement, but rather in order to find the courage to plan its future.

Thank you.

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