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Intervention of the Secretary for Relations with States at the 25th Ministerial Council of the OSCE in Milan

The following is the intervention of the Secretary for Relations with States, H.E. Msgr. Paul Richard Gallagher, at the 25th Ministerial Council of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), taking place in Milan from 6 to 7 December 2018:

Intervention of H.E. Msgr. Paul R. Gallagher

Mr Chairman,

I would like to begin by extending to this 25th meeting of the Ministerial Council the best wishes of His Holiness Pope Francis, who assures the entire OSCE family of his support and prayers.

Furthermore, I wish to express my gratitude and that of my Delegation to the Chairman-in-Office, His Excellency Enzo Moavero Milanesi, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Italian Republic, as well as to the entire 2018 Italian OSCE Chairmanship-in-Office for its endeavours during the course of this year. We are also grateful to the Government of Italy and the Authorities of the city of Milan for their generous hospitality during these two days, which coincides with tomorrow's celebration of this city's patron saint – the 4th century Bishop and Doctor of the Church, Saint Ambrose.

The Holy See was actively involved in the negotiations that led to the Helsinki Final Act and the subsequent CSCE and engages with today's OSCE for one fundamental reason: this 46-year-old process seeks "peace, security and justice and the continuing development of friendly relations and co-operation" among the participating States.¹ By bringing these participating States together around one table, "as sovereign and independent States and in conditions of full equality",² the CSCE and the OSCE, notwithstanding challenges, have proved and continue to prove their value and their impact as the world's largest regional security arrangement. As such, the CSCE/OSCE has both by its very nature and through its history, confirmed that it is not only distinct from other international organizations, but also one that offers added-value to the work carried

out by organizations such as the United Nations or the Council of Europe.

Unfortunately, also our present time is not immune to wars, conflicts and tensions, even within the OSCE region and neighbouring countries. In consideration of its particular nature and mission, the Holy See strongly encourages concerned actors to refrain from actions that destabilize neighbouring countries, but rather to engage in open and honest dialogue, in an effort to strengthen peace and justice and implement the commitments we have undertaken, making use of our Organization's tools that are designed to defuse conflicts and restore a climate of trust and confidence between the participating States.

The Holy See remains a steadfast supporter of OSCE efforts aimed at the resolution of conflicts and preventing and combating transnational threats, including terrorism and violent extremism and radicalization that leads to terrorism, as well as those dealing with broader security-related issues, such as migration, trafficking in human beings, as well as the humanitarian consequences and suffering due to conflict. As "the human person is the foundation and purpose of political life", so our first objective must be to ensure that all people live in peace and security. I take this opportunity to re-affirm the Holy See's readiness to assist and engage with all OSCE procedures, tools and initiatives that seek to make peace a reality for all our peoples.

This willingness and active engagement would also most certainly apply to efforts aimed at preventing and combating violence against women and that seek to eliminate all forms of such violence.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights opens by acknowledging that the "recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world".³ The OSCE's engagement with human rights is based on the same: to "recognize the universal significance of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for which is an essential factor for the peace, justice and well-being"⁴ within and among the participating States. Indeed, the "universality of human rights represents a crucial question for our age, a real topic *stantis aut cadentis*, the answer to which will determine whether human rights continue to mark the common horizon for the construction of our societies, the necessary point of reference for the exercise of political power and a guide for the path to be followed by the international community".⁵

Two developments must be acknowledged in this regard.

First, a radically individualistic interpretation of certain rights and the affirmation of "new rights" – both concepts objectively distant from both the Universal Declaration and the Helsinki Final Act – contribute to making universal consensus much more difficult. If the participating States are unable to even agree on what the concept of 'a human right' signifies, there should be no surprise that the human dimension continues to fall ever further behind the first and the second dimensions in progress on new or more focused commitments adopted by consensus.

Secondly, the universality of human rights is based on the idea that all universal human rights and fundamental freedoms must be protected and promoted. Ignoring some human rights, establishing a hierarchy among human rights, and making respect for one human right conditional on the acceptance of a debatable interpretation of 'rights' is unacceptable. This reality is openly – and sometimes painfully – on display during human dimension events.

In this regard, the Holy See must once more express its concern over the growing prevalence of what Pope Francis has referred to as 'a reductionist approach' to or understanding of freedom of religion or belief. Such an approach

– objectively disconnected from both the Universal Declaration and OSCE commitments – seeks to reduce religions "to the quiet obscurity of the individual's conscience or to relegate them to the enclosed precincts of churches, synagogues or mosques",⁶ revealing not only a failure to appreciate the true sense of freedom of religion or belief, but also the legitimate role of religion in the public square.⁷

Such a failure of understanding continues to feed into sentiments and manifestations of intolerance and discrimination against Christians, what might well be termed “the last acceptable prejudice” in many societies. If we truly seek a broad approach to prevent and combat intolerance and discrimination, we need to avoid a selective approach and give attention also to such manifestations of intolerance and discrimination.

The Holy See, therefore, calls on all participating States to recognize that the only meaningful approach to the human dimension is to seek a common understanding of universal human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as of their protection and promotion.

In conclusion, I wish to renew my gratitude to the Italian Chairmanship for its leadership and the efforts made during this past year and I express my heartfelt wishes of success to the incoming Slovak Chairmanship, while assuring the continued cooperation and support of the Holy See.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.

1 Helsinki Final Act, Declaration on Principles Guiding Relations between Participating States, 1a.

2 OSCE Rules of Procedure, 1.

3 UDHR, Preamble.

4 Helsinki Final Act, VII. Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief.

5 Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher, Intervention at the Council of Europe for the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man, 10 September 2018.

6 Pope Francis, Meeting for Religious liberty with the Hispanic community and other immigrants, Independence Hall, Philadelphia, 26 September 2015.

7 Cf. OSCE Ministerial Council Decision 3/13 on freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief.
