



Holy See shares concerns over rising antisemitism in Europe

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09 February 2022 - Echoing growing concerns over the rise of antisemitism across Europe and beyond, the Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe highlights the need to stem online hate speech and the importance of education to prevent violence.

The Holy See reiterated on Tuesday its concerns over rising anti-Semitic violence and attitudes in European countries, calling on member States of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to ensure the protection of Jewish communities from attacks, but also to prevent these crimes.

Speaking in Warsaw at a conference on combating anti-Semitism in the OSCE region, the Vatican Permanent Observer to the Organization highlighted the need to acknowledge that – despite many commitments adopted and activities carried out by OSCE states - no European member is immune to the scourge.

Anti-Semitism exacerbated by COVID-19 crisis

Msgr Janusz Urbanczyk noted that the fact that attacks are perpetrated when the Jewish community gathers in the synagogue to pray “make them particularly heinous”.

He then called attention to the sentiments and attitudes that are behind these attacks, noting that “anti-Semitic attitude has been exacerbated during the current pandemic crisis through the spreading, especially on-line, of conspiracy theories and trivialization of the Holocaust”, to which young people are particularly exposed.

Freedom of religion and security

Highlighting the “structural” link between protecting freedom of religion and security and stability in the OSCE region, Msgr Urbanczyk recalled that its member States have “a common duty not only to guarantee the protection of Jewish communities (as well as of all religious communities) from attacks, but also to prevent ex ante these crimes.”

Stemming online hate speech

Regarding prevention, the Vatican Observer said a specific attention should be paid to the role of the Internet service providers and social networking services, remarking that social media platforms have increased the spread of anti-Semitic hate speech and misinformation on an unprecedented scale.

“In this context 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.”

The importance of education

The Vatican Observer went on to stress the need for a “proper educational approach” to stem anti-Semitism and discrimination effectively and sustainably.

“Ignorance, prejudices and stereotypes contribute to anti-Semitism in our societies; education can build a bulwark against them by making our society and in particular children and young people – aware of the common responsibility to protect the human dignity of persons and peoples.”

He remarked that education, especially at school “plays an important role in the promotion of religious freedom and non-discrimination”, echoing Pope Francis’ words that education “is one of the most effective ways of making our world and history more human.”

He further noted, in this regard, that “interaction between students who belong to different religions is in itself a great help in understanding the unity of humankind”.

A shared responsibility

Concluding, Msgr Urbanczyk expressed the Holy See’s gratitude to the Polish OSCE Chairmanship for organizing the conference.

“This significant event,” he said, “also reminds us of the shared responsibility to fight this reprehensible form of intolerance and discrimination.”

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