



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS
TO THE PARTICIPANTS AT THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
"RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND THE GLOBAL CLASH OF VALUES"**

*Consistory Hall
Friday, 20 June 2014*

I welcome you on the occasion of your International Conference, dear brothers and sisters. I thank Prof. Giuseppe Dalla Torre for his kind words.

The debate over religious freedom has become very intense recently, turning to both Governments and religious Confessions. On this matter, the Catholic Church refers to the Declaration *Dignitatis Humanae*, one of the most important documents of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council.

In fact, every human being is a “seeker” of the truth of his own origin and of his own destiny. In the person’s mind and in the “heart”, thoughts and questions arise, which cannot be repressed or smothered, such that they emerge from a profound place and are intrinsic to one’s intimate essence. They are questions of religion and, in order to fully manifest themselves, require religious freedom. They seek to shed light on the authentic meaning of existence, on the links that bind it to the cosmos and to history, and seek to rend the darkness that would engulf human history should such questions not be asked, should they remain unanswered. The Psalmist says: “When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, / the moon and the stars, which you have established / what is man that you are mindful of him, /and the son of man that you care for him?” (Ps 8:3-4).

Reason recognizes in religious freedom a fundamental human right which reflects the highest human dignity, the ability to seek the truth and conform to it, and recognizes in it a condition which is indispensable to the ability to deploy all of one’s own potentiality. Religious freedom is not only that of private thought or worship. It is the liberty to live, both privately and publicly, according to the ethical principles resulting from found truth. This is a great challenge in the globalized world,

where weak thought — which is like a disease — also lowers the general ethical level, and in the name of a false concept of tolerance, it ends in persecuting those who defend the truth about man and its ethical consequences.

Legal systems, therefore, whether state or international, are called upon to recognize, guarantee and protect religious freedom, which is an intrinsic right inherent to human nature, to the dignity of being free, and is also a sign of a healthy democracy and one of the principal sources of the legitimacy of the State.

Religious freedom, acknowledged in constitutions and laws and expressed in consistent conduct, promotes the development of relationships of mutual respect among the diverse Confessions and their healthy collaboration with the State and political society, without confusion of roles and without antagonism. In place of the global clash of values, it thus becomes possible to start from a nucleus of universally shared values, of global cooperation in view of the common good.

In light of the acquisitions of reason, confirmed and refined through revelation and the civil progress of peoples, it is incomprehensible and alarming that still today discrimination and restrictions of rights continue for the single fact that one belongs to and publicly professes an unwavering faith. It is unacceptable that real persecution is actually sustained for reasons of religious affiliation! Wars as well! This distorts reason, attacks peace and humiliates human dignity.

It causes me great pain to know that Christians in the world submit to the greatest amount of such discrimination. Persecution against Christians today is actually worse than in the first centuries of the Church, and there are more Christian martyrs today than in that era. This is happening more than 1700 years after the edict of Constantine, which gave Christians the freedom to publicly profess their faith.

I truly hope that your conference defines in depth and great precision the justifications that obligate every legal system to respect and defend religious freedom. I thank you for this contribution. I ask that you pray for me. From my heart I wish you the best and I ask God to bless you. Thank you.