



***XI Plenary Session of the
Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean***

*23-24 February 2017
Porto, Portugal*

H.E. Archbishop Rino Passigato
*Apostolic Nuncio to Portugal
Observer of the Holy See to the XIth Plenary Session of PAM*

Your Excellency, Mr Eduardo Ferro Rodrigues,
President of the Portuguese Parliament;

Your Excellency, Senator Lhou Lmarbouh,
President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean;

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the honour to represent the Holy See at this meeting of the 11th Plenary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean. I am pleased to extend the best wishes of His Holiness Pope Francis, and those of His Eminence Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Secretary of State of His Holiness, to all gathered here today. In so doing, I express the gratitude of the Holy See for the kind invitation to participate as an Observer at this meeting, as it has done so on many previous occasions. The Holy See, for its part, renews its commitment to supporting the goals of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean that seek peace, security and stability by promoting political dialogue that is based on respect on fundamental human rights and the dignity of the human person.

Moreover, I take this opportunity to express the Holy See's appreciation that the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean, since its very beginning, has emphasised the importance of interreligious and cultural dialogue in fostering its goals of security and peace on both sides of the Mediterranean. Therefore, I look forward with interest to the discussions on the work of the Standing Committees, and in particular, of the Third Standing Committee: *Dialogue among Civilisations and Human Rights*.

During his meeting, on 9 January last, with the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, Pope Francis devoted his speech on that occasion to the theme of security and peace, underlining and renewing his personal firm conviction "*that every expression of religion is called to promote peace.*"¹ Unfortunately, in the times in which we live, there has been no shortage of religiously motivated acts of violence that have caused countless innocent victims in various parts of the world. When we consider the great number of religiously inspired works that contribute to the common good through education and social assistance, especially in areas of poverty and conflict, it is particularly repugnant and offensive to all sincere religious believers that religion can be used to foster hatred, violence and death. For this reason, Pope Francis renewed his appeal "*to all religious authorities to join in reaffirming unequivocally that one can never kill in God's name.*"²

Terrorism is one of the most virulent threats to security and peace in the Mediterranean region, and this organisation has played a key role, through the various regional workshops organised under its auspices, in confronting this threat. An essential element of eradicating terrorism is addressing the

¹ Cf. *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See for the traditional exchange of New Year greetings*, 9 January 2017.

² *Ibid.*

root causes, whether they be social, political or economic. Indeed, social poverty has been identified as a driver of terrorism. However, there are many forms of poverty. Indeed, Pope Francis has noted that religiously motivated fundamentalist terrorism *“is the fruit of a profound spiritual poverty, and often is linked to significant social poverty. It can only be fully defeated with the joint contribution of religious and political leaders. The former are charged with transmitting those religious values which do not separate fear of God from love of neighbour. The latter are charged with guaranteeing in the public forum the right to religious freedom, while acknowledging religion’s positive and constructive contribution to the building of a civil society that sees no opposition between social belonging, sanctioned by the principle of citizenship, and the spiritual dimension of life. Government leaders are also responsible for ensuring that conditions do not exist that can serve as fertile terrain for the spread of forms of fundamentalism. This calls for suitable social policies aimed at combating poverty; such policies cannot prescind from a clear appreciation of the importance of the family as the privileged place for growth in human maturity, and from a major investment in the areas of education and culture.”*³

In citing the aforementioned remarks of Pope Francis, I wish to underscore the importance that the Catholic Church gives to the role of religion and education in preventing radicalization that leads to terrorism and extremist violence. A better understanding of the role of religion and education can bring about the authentic social harmony needed for coexistence in a multicultural society.

Thank you for your kind attention.

³ Ibid.