

# Vatican urges protection of religious freedom, response to trafficking

VATICAN CITY - A leading Vatican diplomat called for better protection of religious freedom in the face of increasing acts of violence and discrimination against Christians and members of other religions.

Archbishop Dominique Mamberti, the Vatican secretary for relations with states, also urged a more comprehensive response to the problem of human trafficking and its effects on vulnerable groups such as women and children.

Archbishop Mamberti made the remarks Dec. 4 in a speech to representatives of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe who met in Helsinki, Finland.

He said the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 60 years ago was one of the greatest achievements of the United Nations, and noted that the church was working in every country to make sure those rights are not only proclaimed but also put into practice.

One of these fundamental rights is religious freedom, he said.

"The Holy See promotes this right, demands that it be universally respected, and views with concern the increasing episodes of violence, as well as the ongoing acts of discrimination and intolerance against Christians and members of other religions," he said.

"The idea that religion is a form of alienation is no longer fashionable and believers can rather constitute a powerful factor in favor of the common good," he said.

In a reference to violence in the name of religion, he added: "Hatred can find no justification among those who call God 'our Father.' "

Pope Benedict XVI and other Vatican officials have expressed alarm in recent

months at a growing number of anti-Christian attacks in Iraq and India, and have called upon the governments of both countries to do more to protect their Christian minorities.

Archbishop Mamberti said the scourge of human trafficking today is “a multidimensional social phenomenon of misery, poverty, greed, corruption, injustice and oppression which manifests itself in sexual exploitation, forced labor, slavery and the recruitment of minors for armed conflict.”

He said the root causes of human trafficking include economic factors, such as the imbalance between rural and urban wealth levels; political and juridical factors, such as the absence of legislation to deal with trafficking, mistrust of the law and open borders; and cultural factors, such as the social acceptability of putting children to work, illiteracy and discrimination against girls.

“Globalization and the increased movement of people can also make vulnerable groups, such as women and girls, easier prey for traffickers, who clearly have no regard for the dignity of the human person, and who view people as mere commodities to be bought and sold, used and abused at will,” he said.

The archbishop said there was another aspect of human trafficking that must be collectively addressed: the “trivialization of sexuality in the media and entertainment industries, which fuels a decline in moral values and leads to the degradation of men and women and even the abuse of children.”