

**Statement by Dr. István LAKATOS**  
**Human Rights Ambassador of Hungary**  
**27 November 2013**

Madam President,

Hungary is fully committed to the protection of the fundamental human right to freedom of conscience and of religion for all, including religious minorities. The constitution of Hungary provides all religious communities with equal rights to express their religious identities freely both individually and collectively. While state and church are strictly separated, Hungary acknowledges the positive role of religious communities in the areas of social cohesion and integration as well as in education and in social services. Therefore, our government offers several forms of cooperation for various religious organizations in order to serve the common good.

In the multi-religious, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural context of Central Europe, religion has become a part of the heavy burden of historical traumas, including the practice of discrimination and persecution of religious minorities in the past. Religions have also got a strong potential for promoting peace and reconciliation and for facilitating the healing of memories. That is why Hungary is committed to promote all forms of genuine inter-religious dialogue. As a key event of the Hungarian presidency of the Council of the European Union, Hungary organized an

international conference on inter-religious dialogue in 2011, involving high-ranking local and international representatives of Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities. The closing document issued by this conference states that the conference "considered many questions such as religious diversity and migration and it confirmed particularly the fundamental importance of religious freedom as an essential element in the spectrum of universal human rights."

Hungary notes with deep concern that "to manifest religious belief is seriously restricted in many parts of the world, and that acts of violence against believers, particularly, at present, against Christian believers, but also ongoing expressions of islamophobia and anti-Semitism and discrimination against other religions or ethnic minorities are widespread". Hungary condemns all forms of discrimination or persecution based on one's religious conviction, in the strongest terms.

Hungary has launched concerted governmental action to combat anti-Semitism, which has got religious aspects as well. In 2012 we commemorated the 100th anniversary of the birth of Raoul Wallenberg, a Swedish diplomat and a Righteous among the Nations, who saved many thousands of Hungarian Jews during the holocaust. 2014 is declared to be a Holocaust Memorial Year in Hungary and Hungary will chair the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance in 2015. During these years strong emphasis will be given on government actions to promote social inclusion and the protection of human rights of vulnerable communities, like the Roma in Europe, including the protection of their rights to express their religious identities without any hindrance.

The expression of religious identities often takes shape in community with the adherents to the same religion. We are convinced that the protection of rights of religious minorities - just as the protection of rights of minorities as such - can be full-fledged only, if these communities are provided with a set of collective rights, necessary for the protection of their identity. Hungary thus supports all legitimate demands of religious minorities to have all their human rights legally secured, including the restitution of their property confiscated illegally by oppressive regimes, and that on the basis of equal rights.

Hungary welcomes thus all international initiatives and efforts made for securing the freedom of religion and for the protection of rights of religious minorities. We express our deep appreciation for this Forum and for the important mission of the Independent Expert on Minority Issues, Ms. Rita Izsák.

We are convinced that by protecting minority rights of religious communities the world's cultural and religious diversity is preserved that is vital for building sustainable societies both locally and globally.

Thank you.