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POPE Receives OSCE PA Leaders



On Friday 10 October, His Holiness John Paul II received the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in an historical Audience in the Vatican. The Audience concluded the Assembly's Conference on Religious Freedom organized jointly by the Parliamentary Assembly and the Italian Parliament.

President Bruce George addressed the Pope on behalf of the OSCE PA, and introduced the objectives of the Assembly. *"The Assembly's primary task,"* he stated, *"is to facilitate inter-parliamentary dialogue, an increasingly important aspect of the overall effort to meet the challenges of democracy, respect for human rights, and the rule of law through the OSCE area."*

President George congratulated the Pope on the 25th Anniversary of his Pontificate and expressed appreciation for his important contribution to world peace and human dignity.

"We represent," President George stated, *"millions of citizens and most religious creeds. We are all united, however, by the guiding principles of the OSCE – including the conviction that the freedom of religion or belief is one of the most important human rights. Promoting this freedom entails not only laws and regulations but also tolerance, mutual understanding, and inter-religious dialogue."*

John Paul II, in response to the words of President Bruce George, thanked the Assembly for the visit. The Holy Father expressed his appreciation to the OSCE Parliamentarians and encouraged them to continue their important work .

"I can only invite you, dear legislators, to embrace the commitment that your countries have made within the OSCE in the area of religious freedom. The OSCE is also to be commended for recognizing the institutional weight of this freedom: I am thinking in particular of paragraph 16 of the 1989 Final Document of Vienna. Such a high profile defence of religious freedom is a strong deterrent to the violation of human rights on the part of communities that exploit religion for purposes that are foreign to it."

"On the other hand, the proper promotion of religion satisfies the aspirations of individuals and groups, transcending them and bringing them to a more perfect fulfilment. The respect of every expression of religious freedom is therefore seen to be a most effective means for guaranteeing security and stability within the family of Peoples and Nations in the twenty-first century. Offering my best wishes, I invoke the blessing of Almighty God upon all of you and upon your work in the service of the human person and of peace."

