

2020 3rd Ministerial to Advance Religious Belief

Warsaw, 16.11.2020, VTC – 2/3 minúty

Excellences,

Ladies and gentlemen,

First at all, I wish to thank Minister Zbigniew Rau and State Secretary Mike Pompeo for bringing us together for this very important purpose. Despite not meeting in person in Warsaw, today's online exchange gives us an excellent opportunity to address crucial topics and issues deserving not only our attention, but, above all, our immediate action.

We all agree that right to believe, or not believe, is one of the most fundamental freedoms... and that religious liberty, going hand in hand with democracy, shall be of utmost priority to us. We agree on interdependence of freedom and peace and security. But, despite this logic being so evident, we still witness manifestations of the opposite – religious restrictions, hate and non-tolerance... in most cases directed towards believers, but in many (cases) as a result of the ideology of religious extremism.

Recent terrorist attacks in France and Austria once again showed us that hatred and violent extremism knows no borders. We talk a lot about preventing radicalism endangering our lives and undermining our democracies. But what needs to be said, is that this is not an overnight-project, but rather a complex of ongoing and permanent activities, including **1) education, 2) dialogue** and **3) investment**. But, none of

these alone can address roots of hate – only their synergy can make a difference.

- 1) We must establish and nourish **education** to tolerance and open-minded attitudes towards religion in general, or other religions in particular. We cannot allow extremists to hijack our youth towards radicalism, especially as part of their education.
- 2) When speaking of the second – **dialogue** – I refer to genuine listening – exchange of views of equal sides, including on social and political level. We need religious leaders to be heard, because otherwise, we'll face religion as false political instrument. Having them on our side would help us spread the message of cooperation, tolerance and other positive narratives.
- 3) Last, but not least, we need **investments** to erase economic hardship of many religious communities living on our societies' periphery. If necessary, even affirmative actions are justified, if bringing different groups and minorities together. We simply cannot rely on the open-market nexus resolving inequalities of abysmal nature that, so often, lead to despair and radicalism.

Ladies and gentlemen,

These actions require both national and international *impetus* and ground. Slovakia is well aware of that and has been actively engaged in several multilateral platforms... most recently by chairing the *Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe* and being the member of *Human Rights Council* – in both cases having freedom of religion among its top priorities. Not as moral values only, but also strategic ones.