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2005 ORDINARY SESSION

(Fourth part)

REPORT

Twenty-sixth sitting

Tuesday 4 October 2005 at 10 a.m.

ADDENDUM 1

Women and religion in Europe

The following text was submitted for inclusion in the official report by a member who was present in the Chamber but was prevented by lack of time from delivering it.

Women and religion in Europe

Mrs DAMANAKI (Greece) – The report refers to a crucial issue that is being discussed throughout Europe. The separate role played by the Church and the state is generally accepted, which helps a lot, but there are still social problems to be discussed. The issue of women is very important.

Everybody is free to exercise his or her religious beliefs, women who do not wish to practise a religion, suffer discrimination.

Undoubtedly, religion is a part of the culture and tradition of many countries (as in my country). This role is fully respected. The issue is: what happens when religion violates women's rights and when it encourages discrimination against women? Here, the State must intervene and protect its citizens.

Can religious traditions interfere with the implementation of human rights? We have to answer "no" to this question. Otherwise, we open the window to fundamentalism. The consequences will be fatal.

Some people mistakenly try to present religious influence that undermines the social role of women as a contribution to the family. Women must have a free choice about whether to become a mother. Some women cannot become mothers, no matter how much they try. What happens to those women?

Religion may have its views, but the state must protect all its citizens.

Are there biological differences? They do exist and one respects them, this is far different from trying to establish social discrimination based on biological differences. Women must have the right to self-determination.

Finally, I would like to underline the fact that the equality of all people in front of God must be extended to real life – to our life on earth. That is what Mrs Rosemary Zapfl-Helbling is trying to do in her report by simply saying the truth. That is why I fully support it.