

Archbishop Silvano Tomasi's Address to the UN Human Rights Council Interactive Dialogue

Statement by His Excellency Archbishop Silvano M. Tomasi Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva 23rd Session of the Human Rights

Council Interactive Dialogue

MAY 29, 2013

Geneva, May 27, 2013

Mr. President,

My Delegation congratulates Madam High Commissioner for her presentation as well as for the activities of her office for the promotion, recognition and implementation of human rights.

Mr. President,

The serious violations of the right to freedom of religion in general and the recent continuing discrimination and systematic attacks inflicted on some Christian communities in particular, deeply concern the Holy See and many democratic Governments whose population embrace various religious and cultural traditions. Credible research has reached the shocking conclusion that an estimate of more than 100,000 Christians are violently killed because of some relation to their faith every year. Other Christians and other believers are subjected to forced displacement, to the destruction of their places of worship, to rape and to the abduction of their leaders - as it recently happened in the case of Bishops Yohanna Ibrahim and Boulos Yaziji, in Aleppo (Syria).

Several of these acts have been perpetrated in parts of the Middle East, Africa and Asia, the fruit of bigotry, intolerance, terrorism and some exclusionary laws. In addition, in some Western countries where historically the Christian presence has been an integral part of society, a trend emerges that tends to marginalize Christianity in public life, ignore historic and social contributions and even restrict the ability of faith communities to carry out social charitable services.

Mr. President, The Human Rights Council has recognized that “religion, spirituality and belief may and can contribute to the promotion of the inherent dignity and worth of the human person.” The Christian religion, as other faith-communities, is “at the service of the true good of humanity.” In fact “Christian communities, with their patrimony of values and principles, have contributed much to making individuals and peoples aware of their identity and their dignity”.

In this connection, it may be useful that the Delegation of the Holy See should recall some pertinent data on the current services to the human family carried out in the world by the Catholic Church without any distinction of religion or race. In the field of education, it runs 70,544 kindergartens with 6,478,627 pupils; 92,847 primary schools with 31,151,170 pupils; 43,591 secondary schools with 17,793,559 pupils. The Church also educates 2,304,171 high school pupils, and 3,338,455 university students. The Church’s worldwide charity and healthcare centres include: 5,305 hospitals; 18,179 dispensaries; 547 Care Homes for people with Leprosy; 17,223 Homes for the elderly, or the chronically ill or people with a disability; 9,882 orphanages; 11,379 creches; 15,327 marriage counseling; 34,331 social rehabilitation centres and 9,391 other kinds of charitable institutions. To such data about social action activity, there should be added the assistance services carried out in refugee camps and to internally displaced people and the accompaniment of these uprooted persons. This service certainly doesn’t call for discrimination against Christian.

Mr. President,

Allow me also to congratulate the Delegations, like that of Italy, that took the floor to express a defense of religious freedom in general and Christians in particular since these have been targeted victims of human rights violations and to welcome the position of the Prime Minister of Bangladesh on the introduction of anti-blasphemy law in her country. In conclusion, Pope Francis' words regarding the celebration of the 17th Centennial Anniversary of the Edict of Milan, that opened the way to religious freedom, are an appropriate wish, that "... civil authorities everywhere respect the right to publicly express one's faith and to accept without prejudice the contribution that Christianity continues to offer to the culture and society of our time".

Thank you Mr. President.

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