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OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE



BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIEGE
PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLS

BOLLETTINO

SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

N. 0188

Giovedì 11.04.2002

INTERVENTO DELL'OSSERVATORE PERMANENTE DELL SANTA SEDE PRESSO L'ONU ALLA 58a SESSIONE DELLA COMMISSIONE DEI DIRITTI UMANI DELLE NAZIONI UNITE (GINEVRA 18-26 APRILE)

INTERVENTO DELL'OSSERVATORE PERMANENTE DELL SANTA SEDE PRESSO L'ONU ALLA 58a
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In occasione del dibattito sui diritti umani e la povertà estrema alla 58a sessione della Commissione dei diritti umani delle Nazioni Unite, che si svolge a Ginevra dal 18 marzo al 26 aprile, S.E. Mons. Diarmuid Martin, Osservatore Permanente della Santa Sede, ha pronunciato il 10 aprile 2002 l'intervento che pubblichiamo qui di seguito:

• INTERVENTO DI S.E. MONS. DIARMUID MARTIN

Mr Chairman,

The elimination of poverty has become an overarching dimension of all development policy. Reducing extreme poverty by 50% by the year 2015 is the key goal of the UN Millennium Declaration, from which the other development targets are derived. The reduction of poverty is the focal point of the new strategies of cooperation between the International Financial Institutions and the heavily indebted poorest countries.

The fight against poverty is however above all a moral imperative, especially today due to the scandalous paradox of widespread extreme poverty existing alongside the scientific and social progress capable of eliminating it.

Extreme poverty is perhaps the most pervasive and paralysing form of violation of human rights in our world. The renewed international commitment to fight extreme poverty must thus also have a human rights dimension. As long as scientific progress and social development are not shared equitably by the whole human family, the human rights ethic, centred on equality, will not produce the desired global equity. An ethic of equality must be integrated with an ethic of solidarity. We must build new coalitions of solidarity to ensure that the ethic of equality becomes a reality for all.

The first and most important contribution of a human rights approach to extreme poverty will always be that of

focussing on the dignity of each person and recalling that being forced to live in extreme poverty is an offence against human dignity.

We must ensure that such a human rights approach to extreme poverty becomes not just an ethical principle but also an operative one, in the complex context of today's globalizing world, within which the point of departure of different countries and economies is so different. In this context, the emphasis on identifying best practices seems a useful road to follow.

The Holy See would stress some underlying principles that should inspire the human rights approach to poverty:

A human rights approach must always focus on the person living in poverty as a fellow human person, endowed with dignity, rights and potential. A human rights approach cannot be satisfied with policies that treat persons living in poverty somehow as a threat, as just potential illegal immigrants or asylum seekers, much less as potential terrorists. We respond to the person living in poverty, not out of fear or out of short term political or self-interest, but in a true spirit of solidarity, fostering the common good of the entire global community.

The person living in poverty must not be considered an object to be managed but as a participating subject. Men and women living in poverty demonstrate that they have great ingenuity. Without such ingenuity they would not survive! The focus of international intervention should be to ensure that the genius of the poor can be focussed not just on surviving but on flourishing, on becoming active participants in society in a way worthy of human dignity, with hope for themselves and their families. They must have the necessary access to formation, to credit and to judicial protection needed to achieve such participation.

A human rights approach to poverty elimination must focus on those forms of discrimination and of stigma of which people living in poverty are the special victims. Extreme poverty multiplies discrimination. Stigma damages the self-esteem of persons living in poverty and thus weakens their capacity to participate. One area where stigma has particular negative effects concerns those suffering from HIV/AIDS. A human rights approach will encourage society to embrace AIDS victims as persons who belong and can contribute.

The current and praiseworthy initiatives in the international fight against poverty - such as debt relief and poverty reduction strategies, the opening of trade barriers and good governance - are destined to remain mere strategies unless flesh is put on them through investment in people and in the social infrastructures that will best facilitate human development. The success of these development strategies requires the strengthening of basic human communities that are the tissue of an active civil society and the guarantee of what Pope John Paul II calls "the subjectivity of society [based on] structures of participation and shared responsibility"¹. Following this path, a human rights approach to extreme poverty will bring its particular contribution of integrating an ethics of equality and an ethics of solidarity.

¹ Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, n.46 [00573-02.01] [Original text: English]
