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INTERVENTO DEL CAPO DELEGAZIONE DELLA SANTA SEDE ALLA SESSIONE SPECIALE DELL'ASSEMBLEA GENERALE DELL'O.N.U SUI BAMBINI

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Riportiamo di seguito il testo dell'intervento pronunciato ieri dall'Em.mo Card. Alfonso López Trujillo, Presidente del Pontificio Consiglio per la Famiglia e Capo Delegazione della Santa Sede alla 27ª Sessione Speciale dell'Assemblea Generale dell'O.N.U. dedicata ai bambini, in corso di svolgimento a New York:

• INTERVENTO DELL'EM.MO CARD. ALFONSO LÓPEZ TRUJILLO

Mr. President,

The Holy See wishes to be ever faithful to the Lord's special predilection and tender love for children in the recognition and full respect due to them. Children are a wonderful gift of God.

Over the centuries, countless institutions and works in favor of children have grown up in the Christian communities and rendered a generous service in the most diverse areas: the family, education, health, with special attention to the poorest and neediest. The fight against poverty, which strikes children so cruelly and sows so many victims, is one fundamental need.

During the International Year of the Family (1994), His Holiness John Paul II wrote a significant Letter to Children. They are a source of joy and hope for parents and for society, and they are loved by God in the Child Jesus who came to Bethlehem as a newborn child. The Pope denounced the suffering, dangers and threats of which children are victims: *"They are hungry and poor, they are dying from diseases and malnutrition, they are the victims of war, they are abandoned by their parents and condemned to remain without a home, without the warmth of a family of their own, they suffer many forms of violence and arrogance from grown-ups"* (Letter to Children). As the Pope warns, we cannot be indifferent to the suffering of so many children.

In addition to the many forms of violence mentioned, others are spreading with dramatic effects, such as the moral pollution of the environment that spiritually impedes children from breathing pure air. Families and States cannot avoid the requirements of a "human ecology" (Cf. *Centesimus annus*, No. 30). When moral values are trampled on with impunity, when the atmosphere is artificially charged with eroticism, when the meaning of

human sexuality is emptied and trivialized and children are even induced into unspeakable "lifestyles" and behavior in an alarming climate of permissiveness, the risk of violence grows. Albeit with considerable delay, as there have already been numerous victims, it seems that many are starting to react, to revise their attitudes, and to reinforce legal norms to avoid the devastating consequences.

On various occasions, the Pontifical Council for the Family has held International Congresses on Children:

- The dignity and the rights of children (Rome, June 18-20, 1992)
- The sexual exploitation of children in prostitution and pornography (Bangkok, September 9-11, 1992)
- The family and child labor (Manila, July 1-3, 1993)
- Street children (Rio de Janeiro, July 27-29, 1994)
- International adoption (Seville, February 25-27, 1994).

More recently, on the occasion of the Great Jubilee of the year 2000, we held a World Congress entitled "Children, Springtime of the Family and Society" (Rome, October 11-13, 2000). On June 5, last year, right here at the United Nations, a symposium took place on "Children in Armed Conflict: Everyone's Responsibility", organized by the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See together with the Office of the UN Secretary General's Representative for Children in Situations of Conflict. It would be too long to mention the Congresses, meetings and other activities that have been carried out by the Church throughout the whole world.

It seems that full recognition of the child's human dignity, of all children, images of God, from the moment of their conception, has been lost, and this must be recovered. The true measure of a society's greatness is the extent to which the society recognizes and protects human dignity and human rights and ensures the well-being of all its members, especially children. A healthy society with a real human countenance is in fact one in which everyone recognizes the family as the basic cell of society and as the most important provider and educator of children, as proclaimed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).

It is very important to observe the central criterion mentioned several times in that same Convention whereby "the best interests of the child" must prevail. This enlightening criterion should not be suffocated or scoffed at by unjust laws. The "best interests of the child" is a valuable criterion which has its roots in the child's personal dignity: the child is an end, not an instrument, a means or an object (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, No. 24). The child is the subject of rights, starting from the fundamental right to life from conception. And this fact cannot be denied by anyone, as stated in §9 of the Preamble of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.

The process of human development in all its aspects – physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual and social – is the result of a synergy between the family and society. Only through their effective cooperation can children be protected from all harm, abuse and oppression and be equipped to share and contribute to the common good of humanity. Achieving such development is a great, on-going undertaking which manifests the genuine spirit and the state of health of societies, and it offers appropriate remedies for offenses and needs.

"The best interests of the child" makes it necessary for the child to have an adequate relationship with the family, based on marriage, the cradle and sanctuary of life, the place for personal growth, affection, solidarity, law and the inter-generational transmission of culture. At the service of children, the international community must be committed "to defending the value of the family and respect for human life from the moment of conception. These are values which belong to the basic 'grammar' of dialogue and human coexistence among peoples" (*Discourse of John Paul II on the occasion of the Jubilee of Families*, October 14, 2000).

Therefore, the Holy See believes that the rights of children and the rights of the family should be articulated together. As the fundamental institution for the life of every society, the family based on marriage must be understood as the covenant whereby "a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of their whole life, ... which of its own very nature is ordered to the well-being of the spouses and to the procreation and upbringing of children" (John Paul II, Letter to Families *Gratissimam Sane*, 1994, No. 17; cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 1055; *Charter of the Rights of the Family*, 1983, art. 1-3; *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, art. 16).

The child, all children, in whatever situation or circumstance, should be loved, welcomed, protected and

educated with special dedication and tenderness, and all the more when they face great or burdensome limitations and difficulties.

Everything must be done so that children can be conceived, born, raised and educated in a family that is capable of offering protection and example, in a positive and permanent way, as irreplaceable elements of their upbringing.

The child must be considered a member of the family so that parents, open to the gift of life with a well understood responsible parenthood, can carry out their unrenounceable duties and be aided, not impeded, by society in their mission (cf. *Charter of the Rights of the Family*, art. 1b, 3c).

Only when the family fails should society and the State provide children with what they need, hopefully in a family-like environment that offers them hospitality, dedication, respect and tenderness. "All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, enjoy the same right to social protection, with a view to their integral personal development" (*Charter of the Rights of the Family*, art. 4e).

Mr. President,

My Delegation believes that legislation is needed to protect children from all forms of exploitation and abuse, as in the case of incest and pedophilia, as well as through labor, slavery, the abominable crimes of prostitution and pornography, kidnapping, their use as soldiers or guerrillas, or as victims of armed conflicts or of international or unilateral sanctions imposed on some countries. All these scourges are an affront and a scandal to humanity. These various forms of violence must not go unpunished.

Careful watch should be kept so that adoptions -- both national and international, when truly advisable and in respect for the principle of the "best interests of the child" -- will be made by married couples who give real guarantees of stability, moral solidity, ability to accompany and exemplarity. In this way children can be brought up properly without their development being obstructed or their personalities being destroyed. For the integral and harmonious development of children, as science itself teaches, it is in their best interests to have both a father and a mother.

Mr. President,

My Delegation wishes to stress that the best interests of children is not recognized when, conditioned by the myth of overpopulation -- which the most recent data and demographic trends have shown to be unconvincing --, population policies are imposed that go against the rights of the family and children. First of all, the fundamental right to life must be recognized.

Children are both a wealth and a hope for the human family. It is for this reason that the Delegation of the Holy See expresses its hope that this Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly will have many and abundant fruits to ensure that the children of the whole world will be the "springtime of the family and of society".

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