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INTERVENTO DELLA SANTA SEDE AL TERZO COMITATO DELL'ASSEMBLEA GENERALE DELLE NAZIONI UNITE SULLA LIBERTÀ RELIGIOSA

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In occasione del dibattito sulla libertà religiosa (tema 109), al Terzo Comitato dell' Assemblea Generale dell'O.N.U., S.E. Mons. Renato R. Martino, Capo della Delegazione della Santa Sede, ha pronunciato l'8 novembre scorso l'intervento che pubblichiamo qui di seguito:

● INTERVENTO DI S.E. MONS. RENATO R. MARTINO

Mr. Chairman,

My Delegation welcomes and congratulates Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello upon his election as High Commissioner for Human Rights. The Holy See is confident that his experience in the field of human rights, humanitarian care and protection and peace building will help him to bring great respect and success to the role of the High Commissioner. He can depend on the cooperation and support of the Holy See.

Mr. Chairman, The Holy See welcomes the *Interim Report of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the elimination of all forms of religious intolerance*.

In an annual address to the Diplomatic Corps, His Holiness Pope John Paul II affirmed, "Among the fundamental freedoms which the Church must defend, first place naturally goes to religious freedom. The right to freedom of religion is so closely linked to other fundamental rights that it can rightly be argued that respect for religious freedom is, as it were a touchstone for the observance of other fundamental rights." (Pope John Paul II, Address to the Diplomatic Corps, February 1989)

The Holy See has always defended and promoted respect for the human rights and fundamental freedoms for all people. It should be no wonder then, that my Delegation addresses this item today, as it has done each and every year.

The Holy See is especially concerned that in many parts of the world, discriminatory or intolerant policies

continue, with regard to minorities in States having an official religion.

Additional matters of concern are the combining of ethnic and religious persecution in many parts of the world and the blatant disregard and disrespect for churches, religious shrines or sites.

Mr. Chairman, the mystery of and the belief in God is at the heart of every culture and the greatest of all mysteries. Religion expresses the deepest dreams, hopes and desires of the human person. Religious faith helps to shape people's vision of the world and affects their relationships with others. Indeed, different peoples and cultures throughout history and throughout the world testify to the many and varied ways in which humankind addresses the meaning of creation, history and personal existence.

The right to life, the right to freedom of religion or belief and respect for religious and cultural heritage are the basic premises for human existence. The fact that there are still many places today where the right to gather for worship is either not recognized or is limited to the members of one religion alone or where religious belief is pushed aside in the name of development or 'modern thought' is a sad commentary on any claim to a more just, peaceful world where fundamental rights and freedoms are more widely promoted and respected.

My Delegation renews its conviction that recourse to violence, in the name of religious belief, is a perversion of the very teachings of the major religions. The Holy See reaffirms here today what many religious leaders have repeated so often: "The use of violence can never claim a religious justification, nor can it foster the growth of true religious feeling."

Differences between religious traditions, must be accepted, respected, and tolerated. The practice of any faith must be conducted with respect for other religious traditions. Religious tolerance must be based on the conviction that God wishes to be adored by people who are free. This is a conviction which requires us to respect and honor personal conscience, wherein each person meets God.

When such respect and understanding is not realized, and when the differences in religious belief or conviction leads to civil strife and war, there is a need for mutual forgiveness. The commitment to religious tolerance and collaboration must be based upon the conversion of hearts and upon prayer, which will also lead to the necessary purification of past memories.

Mr. Chairman, the people of the world continue to be scandalized by the sharp divisions that manifest themselves in the destruction of human life in the name of religion. The Holy See renews its call to all women and men of faith everywhere, to commit themselves courageously to the path that leads to peace, tolerance and understanding. This call is not impossible to hear nor is an invitation impossible to accept. It is, however an essential element to building a world in which all people can live in peace and harmony with one another.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[01759-02.01] [Original text: English]