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INTERVENTO DELLA SANTA SEDE AL TERZO COMITATO DELLA 58a ASSEMBLEA GENERALE DELLE NAZIONI UNITE SULLA PROMOZIONE E LA PROTEZIONE DEI DIRITTI DEI BAMBINI

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Il 20 ottobre 2003, nell'ambito dei lavori del Terzo Comitato della 58a Assemblea Generale delle Nazioni Unite, S.E. Mons. Celestino Migliore, Capo della Delegazione della Santa Sede, è intervenuto sul punto 113 dell'agenda: "*Promotion and protection of the right of children*".

Riportiamo qui di seguito il testo dell'intervento:

• INTERVENTO DI S.E. MONS. CELESTINO MIGLIORE

Mr. Chairman,

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child entered into force in September 1990. That same month, a World Summit for Children was held to adopt the Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and a decade-long Plan of Action for its implementation. When world leaders gathered here in the Year 2000 to adopt the Millennium Declaration, children were once again at the center of the concern of this body. In May last year, the XXVII special session of the General Assembly on Children adopted the document, "A World Fit for Children". All these endeavors combine to demonstrate the commitment of the international community to ensure that every child is able to enjoy a better future.

Unfortunately, as we know so well, the situation of children in the world is not always how it should be. Every day, countless children around the world are exposed to dangers and abuse which stunt their growth and development. They suffer immensely as casualties of war and violence; as victims of neglect, cruelty, sexual and other forms of exploitation, racial discrimination, aggression, foreign occupation; as refugees and displaced children. They are often marginalized because they are indigenous, disabled, orphans or street children. In several countries, they are also victims of the scourge of drugs and of natural and man-made disasters. And if all these were not enough, millions of children also become victims of HIV/AIDS, either through mother-to-child viral transmission or by being orphaned due to the AIDS-related premature death of their parents.

In his report on Implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration (A.58/323), the Secretary-General states: "It is unacceptable that, in spite of broad advances in children's health in developing regions since 1990, nearly 11 million children die each year before reaching their fifth birthday, mostly from easily preventable or treatable causes". Infant and child mortality rate could be lowered dramatically with means that are already known and readily available in the market, but tragically beyond the reach of most of the children in need.

These are challenges that the international community must meet, especially within the framework of the Millennium Development Goals. Improving child health and nutrition is a priority. The international community should work for optimal growth and development in childhood, with measures to eradicate hunger, malnutrition and famine, and thus to spare millions of children from unnecessary sufferings in a world that has the means to feed and care for all its citizens. In addition, basic education should be made accessible to the millions of the world's children who are otherwise bound to illiteracy.

On the other hand, children should also be encouraged to contribute their own small efforts in building a better future for their peers around the world, making use of their talents and gifts for their personal growth and for the good of society. The Holy See has an international association for children called Pontifical Society of the Holy Childhood which was founded in the mid-nineteenth century. Its motto is "Let children help children". For more than a hundred years now, this Society have constantly shared their talent, time and treasure to help ameliorate the life of other poor children around the world.

In promoting the well-being of children, the family, as the fundamental unit of society and the natural environment for the growth and development of children, should be given all the necessary protection and assistance. It is in the family that the rights of children are respected best, in accordance with the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity. The concern for the child, while it is a challenge to society as a whole, is primarily and more directly a challenge to families. The Holy See has always affirmed that parents have the duty and the right to be the first and the principal educators of their children. The need for a set of norms to protect the various rights of the child is necessary also because of the lack of a real family policy that is fully guaranteed by law. Moreover, in the context of the upcoming celebration of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, efforts should be intensified to recognize the social role of the family based on marriage which is irreplaceable for the common good. To protect the family means to protect the children.

In our day and age, the recognition of the rights of the child has undoubtedly made progress. But the violation of these rights in practice, exemplified by the many terrible assaults on their innocence and dignity, remains a cause for distress and, at the same time, calls us into action. We must see to it that the welfare of the child is always given priority during all the stages of its development, right from the moment of its conception when they become individual human beings. The international community should assure the well-being of children through political action at the highest level; for, in the end, the attention we give now for the well-being of the children is an assurance for the well-being of society, now and in the future.

Since children are in need of almost everything, they can only spend a peaceful and joyful childhood when they have our solidarity and care. We must not fail them.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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