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Statement of the Holy See to the U.N. in New York at the Security Council Open Debate on The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question (New York, 21 October 2014)

Here below the Statement by H.E. Archbishop Bernardito Auza, Apostolic Nuncio, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations at the Security Council Open Debate on *The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question* (New York, 21 October 2014):

Statement by H.E. Archbishop Bernardito Auza

Madam President,

My Delegation congratulates you on this month's Argentinian Presidency of the Security Council and commends your convening of this timely open debate on "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question".

The Holy See has always followed the situation in the Middle East with great interest and concern. It has always pleaded for negotiations and dialogue among the parties involved. It has airways tried to do all it could to help the victims of violence.

Given the rapidly deteriorating situation in the region during these last months, Pope Francis has intensified his efforts to push for negotiations and call all parties to respect the international humanitarian law and fundamental human rights. During the first week of the current month, the Pope convoked in the Vatican the Apostolic Nuncios (Papal Ambassadors) in the Middle East countries, the Permanent Observers to international organizations and high-ranking officials in the Vatican to discuss the Middle East situation. Then, just yesterday, October 20, the Pope held a meeting with the Cardinals to discuss the same issue. Following these meetings, the Holy See reiterates its conviction that peace in the Middle East can only be sought through negotiated settlements and not through unilateral choices imposed with the use of force.

1. As regards the Israeli-Palestinian question, the Holy See reiterates its support for a twoState solution. Israeli and Palestine, with the vigorous support of the competent organs of the United Nations and of the whole international community, must work toward the final objective, which is the realization of the right of the

Palestinians to have their own State, sovereign and independent, and of the right of the Israelis to peace and security. Pope Francis also reaffirmed this during his visit to the Middle East last May: "The time has come for everyone to find [...] the courage to forge a peace which rests on the acknowledgment by all of the right of two States to exist and to live in peace and security within internationally recognized borders."¹

2. As regards the horrific situation in Syria, the Holy See urgently calls on all parties to stop the massive violations of international humanitarian law and fundamental human rights, and on the international community to help the parties find a solution. There is no other way to alleviate and put an end to the untold sufferings of the entire nation, where half of its population needs humanitarian assistance and around a third has been displaced.

3. As regards Lebanon, the Holy See calls for international solidarity, at this time that the country is gravely affected by the Syrian crisis and by the massive presence of refugees, and exhorts Lebanon to find a solution as soon as possible to the vacancy of the Presidency of the Republic. The Holy See reaffirms its support for a sovereign and free Lebanon. Lebanon is a "message", a "sign" full of hope for the coexistence of the various groups that form it.

4. As regards the grave violations and abuses committed by the so-called "Islamic State" in Iraq and Syria, the competent organs of the United Nations must act to prevent possible new genocides and to assist the increasing number of refugees. The Holy See appeals in particular for the protection of the ethnic and religious groups, including the Christian communities, who are specifically targeted and victimized because of their ethnic origins and religious beliefs. The Holy See insists on the respect of the right of these communities and all the displaced persons to return to their homes and to live in dignity and safety.

5. The Holy See hopes that the United Nations take the escalating, ruthless phenomenon of international terrorism as an occasion to urgently re-enforce the international juridical framework of a multilateral application of the responsibility to protect people from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity and all forms of unjust aggression. With lessons learned from our failure to stop recent horrors of genocide and presently confronted with blatant, massive violations of fundamental human rights and of international humanitarian law, the time is for courageous decisions.

6. Finally, the Holy See reiterates its call to all the religious leaders in the region and everywhere in the world to play a leading role in promoting interreligious and intercultural dialogue, in promptly denouncing every use of religion to justify violence, and in educating all to reciprocal understanding and mutual respect.

Madam President, I wish to end by citing a passage from the words of Pope Francis during his meeting yesterday with the Cardinals: "This unfair situation [in the Middle East] requires, other than and in addition to our constant prayers, an adequate response by the international community."

Thank you, Madam President.

1 Pope Francis, Meeting with Palestinian Authorities, Bethlehem 25 May 2014

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