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The Holy See at UNESCO: educating in an integral ecology

Vatican City, 15 April 2016 – Msgr. Francesco Follo, Holy See Permanent Observer at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) spoke on 8 April at the plenary assembly of its Executive Council, expressing the Holy See's pleasure at contributing to the 2030 Framework for Action on Education and the UNESCO Strategy for action on climate change, which will conclude the Council's autumn session.

In his address, Msgr. Follo affirmed that education and formation must be increasingly linked to ecology and environmental issues. "Indeed, if we want to deliver a comprehensive education, which provides a person with access to his or her full humanity, this cannot be done without an 'integral ecology', as Pope Francis reminds us in his encyclical *Laudato si'* on the defence of our Common Home. In this important document, the Holy Father proposes, among other things, an education whose vocation is the creation of ecological citizenship, forming an integral humanism".

"If, on the one hand, education is a priority, it must be comprehensive as technical and scientific information are not sufficient to educate men and women responsible for their families and at all levels of national and international society. On the other hand, our age bears witness to the growing capacity of the human being to intervene in order to transform. The aspect of the conquest or exploitation of resources has become predominant or invasive, even reaching the point of endangering the environment in its capacity as a 'home'. As a result of the powerful means of transformation offered by technological civilisation, it would appear that the balance between man and the environment has reached a critical threshold".

On the other hand, observed the Holy See representative, "one cannot expect the young to respect the environment if we do not help them, in the family and in society, to respect themselves and each other. Obligations towards the environment derive from duties with regard to the person considered in his or her own right and in relation to other people. Therefore, we must foster an education in ecological responsibility, that translates into a true 'human ecology'. ... Faced with the overexploitation and increasing destruction of the environment, the place occupied by education and formation must be immense: technically, this without doubt lies in increased education for all and the use of more efficient forms of production. However, the progress observed in this field risk proving ineffective if they do not benefit all human beings".

"The problems of our times", emphasised the prelate, "are a reflection of underlying social problems: the unjust distribution of land and capital perpetuates a technical dysfunction that also affects rich countries, and that is the greatest scandal of our times. Therefore, the theme of education in the context of sustainable development cannot be resolved through a simple technical inventory, but rather by considering the moral heart of the problem. For this reason, it is important for children, adolescents and adults to rediscover solidarity. In this regard, the experiences of the UNESCO Schools Projects are very encouraging, and the Holy See applauds UNESCO for every school that moves in the direction of solidarity".

Likewise, "the Holy See supports education in sharing, to enable sustainable development. This is essential for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, within the framework of its medium-term strategy. ... In effect, the greatest duties are necessarily incumbent upon the most gifted, the richest in terms of culture and knowledge, not only in money. Here, I intend 'rich' in the social and cultural sense. ... The 'rich' cannot therefore be considered thus in terms of what they possess. It is what they transmit and share. We are called upon to share. ... And material and 'intangible', spiritual sharing does not imply impoverishment; it instead constitutes mutual enrichment".
