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INTERVENTO DEL DELEGATO DELLA SANTA SEDE ALLA 23MA SESSIONE SPECIALE DELL'ASSEMBLEA GENERALE DELL'ORGANIZZAZIONE DELLE NAZIONI UNITE

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Pubblichiamo di seguito l'intervento che il Membro della Delegazione della Santa Sede presso l'Organizzazione delle Nazioni Unite, Signora Lisa D'Urso, ha pronunciato ieri nel corso della 23ma Sessione Speciale dell'Assemblea Generale dal tema: *"Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-first Century"*:

Madame Chairperson:

The Twenty-third Special Session of the General Assembly was a momentous occasion for women around the world. Only five years after the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the community of nations joined together to reaffirm the dignity and human rights of women, to raise issues of critical importance to the lives of women, and to take steps to confront these challenges.

Despite efforts to implement the Beijing Platform for Action, the scourges of poverty, of illiteracy, of social, political and economic inequalities and of injustice, violence and discrimination still exist. At the same time, the Special Session affirmed that the growing and unsustainable debt burden faced by developing countries, the increasing numbers of women who find themselves driven from their homes and families by war, the multidimensional impact of globalization, the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS and the decreasing levels of funding available through international cooperation continue to stifle efforts toward sustainable development, equality and peace.

Overall, the Holy See was pleased with the outcome document adopted by the Special Session. The document mentions the importance of a holistic view of the health needs of women such as the dangers of and treatment for malnutrition, tropical and cardio-vascular diseases, cancer and HIV/AIDS. Further, the need for education for all as a continued basis for development was reflected in the final text. Important provisions addressing violence against women and trafficking of women and girls and measures for combating poverty were expanded.

The Holy See was particularly pleased to see a clear acknowledgment of the need for all women to have access to basic social services, including education, clean water, adequate nutrition and safe sanitation.

Also incorporated into the outcome document was the need to promote the critical role of women in the family, the basic unit of society. There were acknowledgments of women's social and economic contributions to the family, of the social significance of maternity and motherhood, as well as the need for programmes to support families in conflict situations, for programmes which enable women and men to reconcile their work and family responsibilities and to share household and childcare responsibilities. At the same time, it was very disconcerting to observe the determined efforts of some countries to remove each of these references. Throughout the world and in all circumstances, the family plays a critical role, whether as a stabilizing factor in conflict situations, as an educator, or in the delivery of social services. All women, no matter the diversity of their situation, are members of families and their role in the family must not be ignored. These attacks on the family will only take the community of nations further from the very goals that the Platform for Action seeks to accomplish.

The Special Session demonstrated that a growing number of countries are firmly committed to addressing the root factors of trafficking in women and girls for prostitution and other forms of commercialized sex, forced marriages and forced labor. It was very unfortunate, therefore, that a few countries attempted, albeit unsuccessfully, to limit references to prostitution and to diminish the Beijing language in order to suit their own national situation.

However, Madame Chairperson, the Holy See was disappointed that consensus could not be reached on a few important issues and that, because of time restraints, they could not be included in the document. These included expanded measures for debt relief, restrictions on the trading in small arms, including landmines, and the protection of the right of any health professional or health facility who refuses to perform, cooperate with, refer or arrange for services to which they have objections on the basis of religious belief, or moral or ethical conviction. In regard to the last point, the Holy See affirms that the right of conscience of health-service providers is assured by, inter alia, Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as the constitutional and legislative guarantees of several countries.

Madame Chairperson, although the Special Session marked the end of the five-year review process, the work of the United Nations is far from finished. For its part, the Holy See, through its worldwide network of schools and educational agencies, will continue to offer educational opportunities, and through its hospitals, clinics and health care facilities will provide for the holistic health needs for women, young and old. The Holy See will advocate the broadening of the debt relief initiative and will continue to work toward the eradication of poverty, stressing the need for women living in poverty to participate fully and productively in the economy and society.

At the same time, there is no individual or nation that is in a position to meet alone the extensive challenges that women face in reaching the goals of gender equality, development and peace. Facing these challenges and reaching these goals are the responsibility of the entire human community, and this implies common efforts in solidarity. The community of nations can support and foster these efforts by creating a solid international awareness of the dignity of the human person and an awareness that is deeply rooted in the hearts of each individual, society and nation. This will translate into an environment in which the human rights of women are protected and promoted, the diverse contributions of women are given proper value, and our goals of gender equality, development and peace are attained.

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