



BOLLETTINO

SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

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INTERVENTO DELLA SANTA SEDE ALLA TERZA COMMISSIONE DELL'ASSEMBLEA GENERALE DELLE NAZIONI UNITE

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Pubblichiamo di seguito l'intervento che l'Osservatore Permanente della Santa Sede presso l'O.N.U., S.E. Mons. Renato Raffaele Martino, ha pronunciato ieri alla Terza Commissione dell'Assemblea Generale delle Nazioni Unite "*on item 119c - Human Rights Questions - Religious Tolerance*":

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

Mr. Chairman,

The Holy See welcomes the Report prepared by the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on freedom of religion or belief, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 55/97 of December last year. The Report identifies positive situations where improvements have been made in curbing intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief in certain fields and in certain countries.

Of serious concern to my Delegation, however, is the information contained in the Report which reveals the maintenance, in many parts of the world, of discriminatory or intolerant policies with regard to minorities in States having an official religion; the increase in extremism affecting all religions; and the gradual shift towards non-belief within society, characterized by a growing militancy that enters into competition or conflict with religions.

Mr. Chairman, at the heart of every culture lies the attitude humanity takes toward the greatest of all mysteries: the mystery of God. Indeed, different cultures throughout history and throughout the world testify to the many and varied ways in which people face the question of the meaning of personal existence. Religion expresses the deepest aspirations of the human person. It shapes people's vision of the world and affects their relationships with others.

Religious freedom, therefore, constitutes the very heart of human rights, and the right to religious freedom is based upon the dignity of the human person, who experiences the inner and indestructible exigency of acting freely according to the imperatives of his or her conscience. This inner reflection, even if it does not result in an

explicit and positive assertion of faith, cannot but be respected in the name of the dignity of each one's conscience, whose hidden searching may not be judged by others. This concrete liberty of reflection and its expression has its foundation in human nature itself. As such, "one's exercise of the right to freedom of religion is not to be impeded, provided that the just requirements of public order are observed."¹

The right to life and the right to freedom of religion or belief 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, is a sad commentary on any claim to a more just, peaceful world where fundamental rights and freedoms are more widely promoted and respected. It is a direct and serious contradiction to Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states clearly that "everyone has the right to freedom of religion, including the freedom to change his or her religion or belief." Despite the various national and international Declarations which proclaim the right to freedom of conscience and religion, there are still too many cases of religious repression. It is common knowledge that there are nations in which individuals, families and entire groups are still being discriminated against and marginalized because of their religious beliefs. This grave violation of one of the fundamental rights of the person is a source of enormous suffering for countless believers. "Unhappily," as Pope John Paul II has said, "the world has yet to learn how to live with diversity, as recent events throughout the world have painfully reminded us."²

On the other hand, 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."³ Any strategy which seeks to quell such cases of violence must help people to understand that believers have a duty to treat all men and women as brothers and sisters in the one human family, and that prejudice and enmity have no place in true religion and can never be justified on religious grounds. Such a strategy must assist believers to recognize with joy the religious values that people have in common. Many religious traditions believe in one God, the only God, who is all Justice and all Mercy; most profess a belief in the importance of prayer, of fasting, of almsgiving, of repentance and of pardon.

While no one can ever deny that there are important differences between religious traditions, these differences should be accepted with humility and respect, in mutual tolerance. The practice of any faith must be conducted with respect for other religious traditions because everyone hopes to be respected for what he or she is, and for what he or she conscientiously believes. Religious tolerance is 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 that inner sanctuary called the conscience, wherein each person meets God.

When such respect and understanding is not realized, and when the divisions become manifest in 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 world is scandalized by the sharp divisions that manifest themselves in the destruction of human life. Called to overcome our fears, men and women of faith everywhere are invited to commit themselves courageously to the path that leads to peace, to make a gift of their spiritual wealth, and to share it in a trusting exchange. Such an invitation is not impossible to accept, but rather it is a true and lasting way to peaceful co-existence and human flourishing.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

¹ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Dignitatis Humanae*, no. 2. ² Pope John Paul II, *Address to the United Nations*, 1995, no. 9. ³ *Ibid.*, *Message for World Day of Peace*, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (23-30 December 1998), p.9.[01851-02.01] [Original text: English]

