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INTERVENTO DELL'OSSERVATORE PERMANENTE DELLA SANTA SEDE PRESSO L'O.N.U. SULLE CONDIZIONI AMBIENTALI

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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 a New York su "*on Item 98F - Environment and sustainable development: Protecting of global climate for present and future generations of mankind*":

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

Mr. Chairman:

At the end of the last century, mankind looked back at its achievements of the last one hundred years and felt justifiably proud. It had unlocked the secrets of the atom and had split the nucleus to unleash its energy, it had discovered that the universe is expanding, that life's architecture is based on a beautifully simple double helix of DNA and it had traveled to the moon not to conquer but to learn. We are entitled to a moment of reflection on God's gift of the human intellect.

However, then came the realization that the same mankind that had understood the forces of nature had left out one of them: mankind itself had become a force of nature, so powerful as to be potentially capable of changing our world for centuries to come.

This force has brought about the greenhouse effect and the scientific community at large is now in broad agreement as to the implications of this man-enhanced phenomenon. Indeed, "there is a new and stronger evidence that most of the warming observed over the last fifty years is attributed to human activities" and that coming changes will affect all aspects of the environment and societal well-being, especially for the poor, the vulnerable and the generations yet unborn. (IPCC; "Climate Change 2001, The Scientific Basis", 2001)

Mr. Chairman:

The history of humanity has been punctuated by various sorts of revolutions. The first revolution occurred

thousands of years ago, at the end of the last ice age, when mankind used "knowledge" to sow seeds and found a more stable and predictable source of food. The second revolution began almost three hundred years ago with the industrial revolution when "knowledge" was used to obtain energy, no longer from animals or the wind but from coal and steam. That engineering feat unleashed the build-up of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. More than one hundred years ago, the Swedish chemist S. Arrhenius warned that a doubling of carbon dioxide gas may have dire consequences for humankind and now that phenomenon has been recognized in its full dimension.

Nature required one million years to produce the amount of fossil fuel that humanity burns in only one year. The activities of twenty-five percent of the world's population are responsible for almost seventy-five percent of the global emission of greenhouse gases.

Global warming, as it is popularly called, is global in scale. It recognizes no boundaries, no nationalities, no cultural divides. It is the great equalizer with unpleasant consequences.

Responses to such a phenomenon should reflect our interdependence and common responsibility for the present and the future of our planet, taking into account the important role that the virtue of prudence could play in addressing climate change. Prudence is intelligence applied to our actions through knowledge and wisdom and it is not merely a careful and safe approach to decisions, but rather a thoughtful and reasoned basis for taking or eluding action to attain a moral good and promote the achievement of common good. (United States Catholic Bishops: *Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and the Common Good*, June 2001)

Mr. Chairman,

Perhaps we need a "third revolution" in which we use our knowledge once again. Knowledge is a public good, one we can share with others without losing it. Knowledge will help us move from a model that is resource intensive to one that is knowledge intensive. Knowledge is an unlimited natural resource.

Instead of burning coal and wood, we must begin to burn knowledge so that finally the people of the world will count for more than they produce, that the human person will truly be the center of our concerns for sustainable development. We should not become a civilization that knows the price of everything and the value of nothing.

Mr. Chairman,

After his *Angelus* Message, on the eve of the Rio Conference on Environment and Development, Pope John Paul II shared thoughts that are as relevant even today and appropriate as we prepare for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, to be held in Johannesburg in September, 2002.

"This important meeting - he said - sets out to examine in depth the relationship between protection of the environment and the development of peoples. These are problems which have, at their roots, a profound ethical dimension, and which involve, therefore, the human person, the centre of creation, with those rights of freedom which derive from his dignity of being made in the image of God and with the duties which every person has towards the future generations."

"I invite all to pray - he continued - with me that the high representatives of the various nations of the world, ..., will be farseeing in their deliberations and will know how to orientate humanity along the path of solidarity with humankind and of responsibility in the common commitment to the protection of the earth which God has given us." (*Pope John Paul II, Message before the Angelus, St. Peter's Square, 31 May 1992.*)

Knowledge is the only true inexhaustible resource that assures a sustainable environment and development and, Mr. Chairman, only knowledge, together with an ethical sense of our relationship with the environment, can help to guide our efforts today and for future generations.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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