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INTERVENTO DELL'OSSERVATORE PERMANENTE DELLA SANTA SEDE PRESSO L'UFFICIO DELLE NAZIONI UNITE ED ISTITUZIONI SPECIALIZZATE A GINEVRA ALLA DURBAN REVIEW CONFERENCE (GINEVRA, 20-24 APRILE 2009)

INTERVENTO DELL'OSSERVATORE PERMANENTE DELLA SANTA SEDE PRESSO L'UFFICIO DELLE NAZIONI UNITE ED ISTITUZIONI SPECIALIZZATE A GINEVRA ALLA *DURBAN REVIEW CONFERENCE* (GINEVRA, 20-24 APRILE 2009)

Pubblichiamo di seguito l'intervento che l'Osservatore Permanente della Santa Sede presso l'Ufficio delle Nazioni Unite ed Istituzioni Specializzate a Ginevra, l'Arcivescovo S.E. Mons. Silvano M. Tomasi, Nunzio Apostolico, ha pronunciato questa sera a Ginevra alla *Durban Review Conference*:

• INTERVENTO DI S.E. MONS. SILVANO M. TOMASI

Mr. President,

Allow me to express my congratulations for your election and wish you, the High Commissioner of Human Rights and the entire Bureau success in leading this Conference to a positive conclusion.

Mr. President,

1. The Delegation of the Holy See shares in the aspiration of the international community to overcome all forms of racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia in the awareness that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights"¹ and are united in one human family. In fact, a just international community is properly developed when the natural desire of human persons to relate to each other is not distorted by prejudice, fear of others or selfish interests that undermine the common good. In all its manifestations, racism makes the false claim that some human beings have less dignity and value than others; it thus infringes upon their fundamental equality as God's children and it leads to the violation of the human rights of individuals and of entire groups of persons.

As party to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and to the common efforts of the United Nations and other relevant international organizations, the Holy See endeavours to assume fully its responsibility in accord with its proper mission. It is engaged in combating all forms of racism,

racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance in a spirit of cooperation. The Holy See actively participated in the Durban Conference of 2001 and, without hesitation, gave its moral support to the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA) in the full knowledge that combating racism is a necessary and indispensable prerequisite for the construction of governance, sustainable development, social justice, democracy and peace in the world.

2. Today globalization brings people together, but spatial and temporal proximity does not of itself create the conditions for constructive interaction and peaceful communion. In fact, racism persists: the stranger and those who are different too often are rejected to the point that barbarous acts are committed against them, including genocide and ethnic cleansing. Old forms of exploitation give way to new ones: women and children are trafficked in a contemporary form of slavery, irregular immigrants are abused, persons perceived to be or who in fact are different become, in disproportionate numbers, the victims of social and political exclusion, ghetto conditions and stereotyping. Girls are forced into unwanted marriages; Christians are jailed or killed because of their beliefs. Lack of solidarity, an increase fragmentation of social relations in our multicultural societies, spontaneous racism and xenophobia, social and racial discrimination, particularly regarding minorities and emarginated groups, and political exploitation of differences, are evident in everyday experience. The global impact of the current economic crisis affects, most of all, the vulnerable groups of society; this demonstrates how too often racism and poverty are inter-related in a destructive combination.

The Holy See is also alarmed by the still latent temptation of eugenics that can be fuelled by techniques of artificial procreation and the use of "superfluous embryos". The possibility of choosing the colour of the eyes or other physical characteristic of a child could lead to the creation of a "subcategory of human beings" or the elimination of human beings that do not fulfil the characteristics predetermined by a given society. Moreover, increased security concerns and the consequent introduction of excessive measures and practices have created a greater lack of confidence among people of different cultures and have exacerbated the irrational fear of foreigners. The legitimate fight against terrorism should never undermine the protection and promotion of human rights.

3. Building on progress already made, our Durban Review Conference can be the occasion to set aside mutual differences and mistrust; reject once more any theory of racial or ethnic superiority; and renew the international community's commitment to the elimination of all expressions of racism as an ethical requirement of the common good, the attainment of which "is the sole reason of existence of civil authorities"² at national, regional and international levels. Sharing resources and best practices in the concerted effort to implement the recommendations of the DDPA to eradicate racism is to acknowledge the centrality of the human person and the equal dignity of all persons. Such a task is the duty and responsibility of everyone. It is a clear example that doing what is right pays a political dividend since it lays the foundation for a peaceful, productive and mutually enriching living together.

4. International covenants and declarations as well as national legislation are indispensable to create a public culture and to provide binding provisions capable of combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. Without a change of heart, however, laws are not effective. It is the heart that must continually be purified so that it will no longer be governed by fear or the spirit of domination, but by openness to others, fraternity and solidarity. An irreplaceable role is played by education that shapes mentalities and helps to form consciences to embrace a more comprehensive view of reality and reject any form of racism and discrimination. Some educational systems should be reviewed so that every aspect of discrimination may be eliminated from teaching, textbooks, curricula and visual resources. The end-process of such education is not only the recognition of everyone as having equal human worth and the elimination of racist thinking and attitudes, but also the conviction that States and individuals must take the initiative and make themselves a neighbour to all. Informal and general education plays a crucial role as well. Media, therefore, should be accessible and free of racist and ideological control as this leads to discrimination and even violence against persons of different cultural and ethnic background. In this way, educational systems and media join the rest of society in upholding human dignity which only a collective action of all sectors of society can protect and promote. In such a context of mutual acceptance, the right of access to education on the part of racial, ethnic and religious minorities will be respected as a human right that ensures the cohesion of society with the contribution of everyone's talents and capacities.

5. In the fight against racism, faith communities play a major part. The Catholic Church, for example, has not spared its best energies to strengthen its many scholastic institutions, to establish new ones, to be present in dangerous situations where human dignity is trampled upon and the local community is disrupted. In this vast educational network, it teaches how to live together and how to recognize that any form of racial prejudice and discrimination hurts the common dignity of every person created in the image of God and the development of a just and welcoming society. For this reason, it stresses that "individuals come to maturity through receptive openness to others and through generous self-giving to them... In this perspective, *dialogue between cultures... emerges as an intrinsic demand of human nature itself, as well as of culture...* Dialogue leads to a recognition of diversity and opens the mind to the mutual acceptance and genuine collaboration demanded by the human family's basic vocation to unity. As such, dialogue is a privileged means for building *the civilization of love and peace.*"³ The contribution of faith communities in combating racism and building a non-discriminatory society becomes more effective if there is a genuine respect of the right to freedom of religion as clearly enshrined in human rights instruments. Unfortunately discrimination does not spare religious minorities, a fact that increasingly concerns the international community. The response to this legitimate concern is the full implementation of religious freedom for individuals and their collective exercise of this basic human right. While the right to freedom of expression is not a license to insult the followers of any religion or stereotype their faith, existing mechanisms that provide legal accountability for in

citement to racial and religious hatred should be used in the framework of human rights law to protect all believers and non-believers. National judicial systems should favour the practice of 'reasonable accommodation' of religious practices and should not be used to justify the failure to protect and promote the right to profess and freely practice one's religion.

6. The challenges ahead of us demand more effective strategies in combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. These are evils that corrode the social fabric of society and produce innumerable victims. The first step for a practical solution lies in an integral education that includes ethical and spiritual values which will favour the empowerment of vulnerable groups like refugees, migrants and people on the move, racial and cultural minorities, people prisoners of extreme poverty or who are ill and disabled, and girls and women still stigmatized as inferior in some societies where an irrational fear of differences prevent full participation in social life. Secondly, in order to achieve coherence among the various structures and mechanisms designed to counteract racial attitudes and behaviour, it is necessary to undertake a new examination aimed at making the various approaches more incisive and efficient. Thirdly, the universal ratification of major instruments against racism and discrimination, such as the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, will signal the political will of the international community to fight all expressions of racism. Finally, there is no substitute for fair national legislation that explicitly condemns all forms of racism and discrimination and enables all citizens to participate publicly in the life of their country on the basis of equality in both duties and rights.

7. Therefore, the work of this Conference has taken a step forward in combating racism, the reason for most countries to stay and join efforts for an outcome that responds to the need of eliminating old and new manifestations of racism. The Conference, as an international forum for the exercise of the right to freedom of expression, has unfortunately been used to utter extreme and offensive political positions that the Holy See deplores and rejects: they do not contribute to dialogue, they provoke unacceptable conflicts, and in no way can be approved or shared.

Mr. President,

8. Eight years ago the countries of the world engaged themselves in a global commitment to combat racism through the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Plan of Action. This vision of change remains incomplete in its implementation, and so the journey must continue. Progress will be achieved through a renewed determination to translate into action the convictions reaffirmed at the present Conference "that all peoples and individuals constitute one human family, rich in diversity" and that all human beings are equal in dignity and rights. Only then will the victims of racism be free and a common future of peace, ensured.

1 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, art. 12 Pope John XXIII, Encyclical *Peace on Earth* 3 Pope John Paul II, *Message for the Celebration of World's Day of Peace*, 2001, n. 10[00632-02.01] [Original text: English][B0267-XX.01]
