HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE
BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIEGE
PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLS

BOLLETTINO

SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

N. 0134

Mercoledì 10.03.2010

Pubblicazione: Immediata

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Here below the statement delivered by H.E. Archbishop Celestino Migliore, Apostolic Nuncio, Permanent Observer of the Holy See, on 8 March 2010, at the 54th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (Economic and Social Council) on Item 3: Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century":

Mr. Chairman,

As this Commission undertakes a fifteen-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, my delegation wishes you and your Bureau a productive session for the good of all women in the world.

From the successive interventions in these days in the general debate, it seems that the assessment is not entirely positive: it includes some light, but also many and disturbing shadows.

The advancements achieved regarding the status of women in the world in the last fifteen years include, among others, improvements in the education of girls, the promotion of women as key to eradicating poverty and fostering development, growth of participation in social life, political reforms aimed at removing forms of discrimination against women and specific laws against domestic violence.

In particular, among the many parallel events, some have stressed the indispensable role played by civil society in all its components, in highlighting the dignity of women, their rights and responsibilities.

This having been said, women continue to suffer in many parts of the world.

Violence in the form of female feticide, infanticide, and abandonment are realities that cannot be brushed aside. Discrimination in health and nutrition occurs throughout the lives of girls and malnutrition affects girls much more than boys, stunting future physical and mental growth. Girls continue to account for the majority of children out of school and girls and women 15 years of age and over account for two-thirds of the world's illiterate population.

It is a sad fact that three quarters of those infected by HIV/AIDS are girls and women between the ages of 15 and 24; the proportion of women infected with HIV is increasing in Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America; and in sub-Saharan Africa, 60% of all adults and three out of four young people living with the virus are female.

Of those who are trafficked across international borders each year, minors account for up to 50% and aproximately 70% are women and girls with the majority of transnational victims being trafficked into commercial sexual exploitation. Around the world girls and women are victims of physical, sexual and psychological violence, including rape as a weapon of war in various parts of the world, not to mention economic abuse.

The reasons for this precarious situation are various. The analyses in these days tend to be found mostly, and not without good reason, in cultural and social dynamics as well as delays and slowness of policy. Yet we would do well to look also to principles, priorities and action policies in force in international organizations, namely, that system of motivations, values, guidelines and methodologies that guide the UN's work on women's issues.

Achieving equality between women and men in education, employment, legal protection and social and political rights is considered in the context of gender equality. Yet the evidence shows that the handling of this concept, as hinted at in the Cairo and Beijing Conferences, and subsequently developed in various international circles, is proving increasingly ideologically driven, and actually delaysthe true advancement of women. Moreover, in recent official documents there are interpretations of gender that dissolve every specificity and complementarity between men and women. These theories will not change the nature of things but certainly are already blurring and hindering any serious and timely advancement on the recognition of the inherent dignity and rights of women.

Almost no outcome document of international Conferences and Committees, or Resolution fails to attempt to link the achievement of personal, social, economic and political rights to a notion of sexual and reproductive health and rights which is violent to unborn human life and is detrimental to the integral needs of women and men within society. While at the same time only seldom are women's political, economic and social rights mentioned as an inescapable clause and commitment. This is particularly distressing given the widespread maternal mortality occurring in regions where health systems are inadequate. A solution respectful of the dignity of women does not allow us to bypass the right to motherhood, but commits us to promoting motherhood by investing in and improving local health systems and providing essential obstetrical services.

Mr. Chairman,

Fifteen years ago the Beijing Platform for Action proclaimed that women's human rights are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights. This is key not only to understanding the inherent dignity of women and girls but also to making this a concrete reality around the world.

The Holy See reaffirms its commitments for improving the condition of women. Its call to Catholic institutions, on the occasion of the Beijing Conference, for a concerted and prioritized strategy directed to girls and young women, especially the poorest, has yielded over the past years many significant results, and remains a strong commitment to implementing and promoting this task for the future.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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