



Statement of H.E. Archbishop Ettore Balestrero, Apostolic Nuncio
Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations
and Other International Organizations in Geneva
at **the 57th Regular Session of the Human Rights Council,**
Item 2: General Debate

Geneva, 11 September 2024

Mister President,

For 75 years the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has served as a moral compass, reminding everyone that our common humanity transcends borders and differences. However, the commitment to human rights never ends, and the current state of the world provides ample of evidence of this.

As conflicts appear to be escalating, especially in Ukraine and Gaza, the Holy See strongly reiterates that war is always a defeat for all and benefits no one, and once more calls for dialogue to facilitate peaceful and just solutions. International humanitarian law remains fundamental to safeguard human dignity. Unfortunately, its repeated and increasingly serious violations provoke immense human suffering, exacerbate humanitarian crises, undermine the rule of law and favour impunity.

Furthermore, it is imperative to acknowledge that a considerable number of individuals are compelled to flee their homes due to the threat of violence or even persecution on the basis of their religion. It is essential to address this issue, at a time when discrimination, harassment and violence are on the rise and many faith communities, especially Christians, are targeted. Religious freedom is “the right to live in the truth of one’s faith and in conformity with one’s transcendent dignity as a person,”¹ and has rightly been called “the source and synthesis” of all human rights.² Upholding this right is a sign of “authentic progress in any regime, in any society, system or milieu”³. States have a positive obligation to foster an environment that promotes freedom of religion, belief and conscience, the fruits of which are greater peace and stability for all.

¹ Pope Paul VI, Address to the General Assembly of the United Nations, 4 October 1965.

² Cf. Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 155.

³ Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis*, 17.

Additionally, whatever affects one faith-community directly, often affects other faith-communities indirectly.

As more and more people flee wars, violence and persecution, it is also necessary to expand safe and regular pathways for refugees and migrants. This can only be achieved by “promoting in every way a global governance of migration based on justice, fraternity and solidarity”.⁴

Moreover, in light of the alarming rise in global inequalities, it is imperative to transcend narrow selfish perspectives and instead to join forces and resources “to fight the real battles of civilization together: the fight against hunger and thirst, the fight against disease and epidemics; the fight against poverty and modern-day slavery.”⁵ Therefore, my Delegation reiterates Pope Francis’ call “to turn the tools of war - tools of death - into tools of life.”⁶

International fora, such as the Human Rights Council, should serve as privileged arenas where States, while placing human dignity at the centre, can promote human fraternity through encounter and dialogue, and develop meaningful responses to the key issues of our time. It is, however, unfortunate that this is not always the case. While there is a willingness to speak, this is all too often not accompanied by a reciprocal willingness to listen, leading to a tendency to impose ideas and agendas at the expense of poorer and less powerful countries. This undermines the multilateral project and takes time, energy and focus away from the bigger challenges facing our world.

The work of the Human Rights Council is instrumental to these endeavours, but its success and longevity are contingent upon a return to the fundamental principle of consensus. This can only be achieved through genuine dialogue and respect for the positions of sovereign States, especially with regard to sensitive issues pertaining to human dignity. In order to address this challenge, a renewed commitment is necessary. My Delegation hopes that this session will provide a renewed opportunity to work together in a manner to protect human dignity, foster human fraternity and promote peace and stability.

Thank you, Mister President.

⁴ Pope Francis, General Audience, 28 August 2024.

⁵ Message sent on behalf of the Holy Father by Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin for the Ninth Water Forum, 21 March 2022.

⁶ Pope Francis on X, 19 August 2023.