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INTERVENTO DELLA SANTA SEDE AL DIBATTITO GENERALE DELLA 61ma SESSIONE
DELL'ASSEMBLEA GENERALE DELL'ONU

Pubblichiamo di seguito l'intervento che l'Arcivescovo S.E. Mons. Giovanni Lajolo, Presidente del Governatorato dello Stato della Città del Vaticano, ha pronunciato ieri in qualità di Capo Delegazione della Santa Sede, nel corso del Dibattito Generale della 61ma Sessione dell'Assemblea Generale dell'ONU (19-29 settembre 2006):

• INTERVENTO DI S.E. MONS. GIOVANNI LAJOLO

Madam President,

Today's world and the ideology of power

1. Not so long ago it appeared that our world was growing, at a pace beyond our control, into a single global village. Today's reality, by contrast, appears more and more fractured. The world is divided by culture, faith, wealth and levels of material advancement, and even more by attitudes towards power, authority and cooperation. Our efforts to overcome divisions and to harmonize differences have been hesitant, at times even half-hearted. Attempts to strengthen the United Nations structures and procedures for the new millennium seem thwarted by our own shortcomings. As the recent struggle between Israel and Hezbollah has tragically demonstrated, it is not so much the want of peacemaking and peacekeeping experience and resources which

leaves vulnerable non-combatants to suffer and die; prior to this there exists the difficulty of moulding a consistent political will on the part of the international community.

In the story of the Tower of Babel, the ancient world has left us an image of our current divided state. The confusion of tongues at Babel is the symbol of the divisions, misunderstandings and hostilities spawned not by nature, but by human pride. Human pride hampers the acknowledgment of one's neighbour and the recognition of his or her needs and even more makes people distrusting. Today, that same negative fundamental attitude has given rise to a new barbarism that threatens world peace. Terrorists, and their various organizations, are the contemporary version of it, rejecting the best achievements of our civilization. Even in an order of quite a different nature it cannot be denied that also superpowers, regional powers, aspiring powers and oppressed peoples sometimes yield to the temptation to believe, despite the evidence of history, that only force can bring about a just ordering of affairs among peoples and nations. The ideology of power scorns any restraint placed upon the use of force. It can go so far as to regard the possession of nuclear weapons as an element of national pride, and it does not exclude the outrageous possibility of employing nuclear weapons against its adversaries. Currently eight countries – and there may be others tempted to join their ranks – possess nuclear weapons comprising approximately 27,000 nuclear warheads – enough to destroy our planet many times over. Meanwhile, the implementation of the Treaty of Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons appears to be stalled and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty still needs to be ratified by some countries to enter into force. How can we stand still?

Old and new challenges of the United Nations

2. This Organization was founded on a very different understanding of human affairs: peace can only be achieved by shared labours aimed at securing a decent and dignified life for all. Due to the East-West struggle, the United Nations was able to achieve only an impoverished sort of peace. After the end of the Cold War, however, and the experience of innovative responses to the conflicts of the 1990s, some of which intertwined with fights for ethnic and religious identity, the birth of a new millennium offered new opportunities for realizing humanity's hopes for a just and peaceful world in which all people might live in dignity. Recently the Secretary-General's proposals set this Organization on the path of reform; its lofty goals, however, will be reached only by overcoming the narrow confines imposed by the dominance of national interests so that we may open ourselves to the vision of a world both reconciled and based on solidarity.

In this spirit, the Holy See continues to be an advocate of the United Nations and favours its ongoing reform in the fields of peacebuilding, development and human rights. In the same spirit, the Holy See commends the decision to create the Peacebuilding Commission. The fundamental responsibility of political authority is to promote, defend and safeguard the human rights of its people. Too often international bodies act, if at all, only after war is under way or when innocent populations have long been under assault. When the rights of whole groups of people are violated - grievous examples could be mentioned in Europe, Asia and Africa - or when they go unprotected by their own Governments, it is entirely right and just that this Organization intervene in a timely manner by suitable means to restore justice. The need to improve the system for effective humanitarian interventions in catastrophes brought on by war, civil conflict and ethnic strife will be an important test of the UN reform agenda.

Strengthening the capacity of this Organization to foresee a conflict or to resolve conflicts through negotiation and transform them nonviolently before there is resort to force is therefore a goal of primary importance in the renewal of the Organization. In this regard, I regret to say that the Security Council's Resolution 1701 of 11th August 2006 could have been adopted with the same wording one month previously. If the repeated pleas for an immediate cessation to the violence, made by many, including Pope Benedict XVI, had been acted upon, the killing of thousands of civilians and numerous young soldiers, the flight of peoples and the enormous indiscriminate devastation need not have occurred; meanwhile none of the outcomes that some governments put forward as a reason for the continuation of hostilities in Lebanon has in fact been achieved.

As history has shown, for lack of sufficient capacity of intervention and common will, millions have died in needless conflicts: "*inutili stragi*", that is, "*pointless massacres*", to repeat a famous phrase of Benedict XV, Pope during the First World War. The late Pope Paul VI's appeal, uttered in this Hall on 4th of October 1965 – "*Jamais*

plus la guerre", "Never again war" – today rings like an accusation in the heart of the collective conscience of humanity.

Development as the high road to peace

3. The surest way to prevent war is to address its causes. It must not be forgotten that at the root of war there are usually real and serious grievances: injustices suffered; a lack of development, democracy, human rights and the rule of law; legitimate aspirations frustrated, and the exploitation of multitudes of desperate people who see no real possibility of improving their lot by peaceful means. How can we not be disturbed by the images of countless exiles and refugees living in camps and enduring subhuman conditions, or by those desperate groups who, intent upon seeking a less wretched future for themselves and their children, are driven to face the risks of illegal emigration? And what of the millions of people oppressed by misery and hunger, and exposed to lethal epidemics, who continue to cry out to our sense of humanity? These too are challenges to our desire for peace.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the repeated promises of world leaders to support them have offered the prospect of alleviating such intolerable conditions, but implementation has been lacking. Not all goals will be achieved, just as other important agreements have not always been implemented. Likewise, the expectations that the Doha Round of world trade negotiations would establish a floor of basic equity in world markets have been frustrated. These failures to correct fundamental inequalities in the world economic system are fast becoming lost opportunities to advance a moral alternative to war. But the failures, though painful and distressing, cannot weaken our common will to pursue the high road to peace. We are all aware of this: the present lack of progress in the fields of development aid and trade reform threatens everyone's security and well-being. By contrast, fulfillment of the MDGs and the resumption of the latest WTO trade round promise economic progress, the alleviation of poverty, a reduction in terrorism and increased social harmony. Building peace for tomorrow requires doing justice today.

Human rights: pillars of peace

4. Like development, the protection of human rights is an essential pillar in the edifice of world peace, for peace consists in people's unimpeded enjoyment of their God-given rights. The Holy See regards the promotion of human rights as one of the United Nations' primary forms of service to the world. It hopes the newly formed Human Rights Council will enhance the enjoyment of those rights on the part of every people and the citizens of every nation. The diversity among cultures allows for differences in emphasis and implementation of human rights, but the human nature which is their foundation and is common to the whole of human society, permits no basic human right to be eclipsed or subordinated for the sake of other rights. Every Government must clearly understand: violation of the fundamental rights of the person cannot be removed from the attention of the international community under the pretext of the inviolability of a State's internal affairs.

Among fundamental human rights, I would like to draw attention to three primary rights:

a) the right to life: the increasing recognition of the sacredness of life, witnessed also by the growing rejection of the death penalty, needs to be matched by a thorough protection of human life precisely when it is at its weakest, that is, at its very beginning and at its natural end;

b) the right to religious freedom: the respect for religious freedom is the respect for the intimate relationship of the believing person with God – both in its individual and social aspects – of which there is nothing more sacred;

c) the right to freedom of thought and expression, including freedom to hold opinions without interference and to exchange ideas and information and the consequent freedom of the press: the observance of this right is necessary for the fulfillment of each person, for the respect of cultures and for the progress of science.

We must acknowledge, however, that not all fundamental rights – and in particular the three which I have mentioned – are adequately protected in every nation, and, in not a few, they are openly denied, even among States sitting on the Human Rights Council.

Dialogue among religions and peace

5. Although in some cases religion continues to be cynically exploited for political ends, it is my delegation's firm belief that, at its best, truest and most authentic, religion is a vital force for good, for harmony and for peace among peoples. It appeals to the noblest in people's nature. It feeds the hungry and clothes the naked. It binds up the wounds of war, both physical and psychological. It provides sanctuary to refugees and hospitality to migrants. It cultivates peace in hearts that in turn bring harmony to human society. It weaves bonds of solidarity that overcome every form of mistrust, and through forgiveness it lends stability to once divided societies.

Twenty years ago, the late Pope John Paul II brought together the leaders of the world's religions to pray and to bear witness to peace. That collective witness was renewed in 1993 during the Bosnian war and in 2002 following the barbarous September 11 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington. More recently, on the 23rd of July of this year, faced with the spreading war in Lebanon, Pope Benedict XVI invited Christians and all believers to join him in a day of prayer and penitence, imploring God for the gift of peace for the Holy Land and the Middle East.

In this last generation, the world's religions, their leaders and their adherents have shown themselves time and again to be willing to dialogue and to promote harmony among peoples. Together, religions have offered the world the example and the service of dialogue. A sincere dialogue necessarily entails self-critical analysis of the relationship of our traditions to those social, political and economic structures prone to become agents of violence and injustice.

The engagement of Benedict XVI for dialogue

6. On Wednesday 20 September last, Pope Benedict XVI repeated his unequivocal support for interreligious and intercultural dialogue, and expressed the hope that what he had said at the University of Regensburg might "*be a boost and an encouragement for positive and even self-critical dialogue, both between religions and between modern reason and the faith of Christians*". The Pope – as is known – expressed sadness that some passages in his academic address could have lent themselves to misinterpretation. His real intention was to explain that "*not religion and violence, but religion and reason go together*", in the context of a critical vision of a society which seeks to exclude God from public life. Two days ago, while receiving the Ambassadors of OIC countries accredited to the Holy See, he added: "The lessons of the past must... help us to seek paths of reconciliation, in order to live with respect for the identity and freedom of each individual, with a view to fruitful cooperation in the service of all humanity...respect and dialogue require reciprocity in all spheres, especially in that which concerns basic freedoms, more particularly religious freedom".

If, on the one hand, religious motivation for violence, whatever its source, must be clearly and radically rejected, on the other, it must be emphasized that in political life one cannot disregard the contribution of the religious vision of the world and of humanity. In fact – as the Pope affirmed – were reason to turn a deaf ear to the divine and relegate religion to the ambit of subcultures, it would automatically provoke violent reactions: and violent reactions are always a falsification of true religion. The Holy Father, in defending the openness of political and cultural activity to the Transcendent, did not wish to do anything other than make a decisive contribution to the dialogue between cultures, by helping to open western thought to the riches of the patrimony of all religions.

It falls to all interested parties – to civil society as well as to States - to promote religious freedom and a sane, social tolerance that will disarm extremists even before they can begin to corrupt others with their hatred of life and liberty. This will be a significant contribution to peace among peoples, because peace can be born only from the hearts of human beings.

Conclusion

7. Together with this heartfelt wish, it is my honour to conclude by conveying to you, Madam President, and to the peoples here represented, the cordial greetings of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI. Upon the deliberations of this General Assembly, he invokes an abundance of Almighty God's blessings.

Thank you, Madam President.

[01335-02.02] [Original text: English]

INTERVENTO DELLA SANTA SEDE ALLA SECONDA SESSIONE DEL CONSIGLIO DEI DIRITTI UMANI

Il 21 settembre scorso, nel corso della seconda sessione del Consiglio dei Diritti Umani. S.E. Mons. Silvano Maria Tomasi, Osservatore Permanente della Santa Sede presso l'Ufficio delle Nazioni Unite e le Istituzioni specializzate a Ginevra, ha pronunciato l'intervento che riportiamo qui di seguito:

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

Mr President,

Thank you for the time allotted to discuss the issues of religious tolerance and freedom, topics that certainly require careful and extended reflection in the years ahead. For now it can suffice to note that where there is doubt, the best interpreter of a text is its author. The Holy Father Benedict XVI has explained what he meant. It is mere fairness to take Him on His words.

1. Twenty five years ago, the international community adopted by consensus the important Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief.¹

2. Today the implementation of this Declaration remains in many ways still a distant goal, a work in progress requiring concerted action to promote the standards of religious freedom recognized by the international community. In several countries intolerance and violent acts directed in particular at people and communities of different religions violate their rights in a variety of ways.

3. The Delegation of the Holy See observes that legal structures have not everywhere sufficiently evolved to protect religious minorities and their members, even when they are citizens of the countries concerned.

4. The rapid impact of the information and communication technologies gives new meaning to the global village beyond its economic networks. A plurality of ideas and cultures are brought closer and are mingled even in remote corners of the world, and the vast movements of migrants make them visible and concrete in daily life. What emerges is either a potential for fears and conflicts, or a new phase of mutual enrichment and respect that afford the opportunity to convey the contributions of all to more justice and a stable peace. An attitude of openness and mutual acceptance is therefore more urgent than any law tending to impose them, the education of the heart and the mind to recognize and value each person as an equal member of the human family. Communication media and textbooks should contribute in this effort and not stir up emotions with ambiguous or false messages that foster intolerance and close the minds to a future of conviviality.

5. To build such a future, a deeper understanding is needed: 1) of the fundamental role and contribution of religion in the lives of individuals and communities; 2) of the differences among religions so that an honest and fruitful dialogue may take place; 3) of current geopolitics since regional and religious identities do not necessarily coincide, and this calls for a correction of perceptions.

6. Religion and the reason for religious tolerance are rooted in the person, believer or not. Focusing on ideologies rather than on people and communities of believers carries the risk of transforming religious claims into political self-interest.

Mr. President

7. In conclusion, allow me to use the words of Pope Benedict XVI to Representatives of Muslim Communities

last year: "The lessons of the past must help us to avoid repeating the same mistakes. We must seek paths of reconciliation and learn to live with respect for each other's identities. The defense of religious freedom, in this sense, is a permanent imperative."²

Thank you, Mr. President.

¹ The dignity and equality inherent in all human beings, a basic principle of the Charter of the United Nations, were seen as fundamentally violated when the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion a person held and exercised "either individually or in community with others and in public or in private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching" (art. I, 1) is disregarded.² Apostolic Trip of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Cologne (Germany) on the occasion of the XX World Youth Day (August 18-21, 2005) - Audience to the Representatives of Muslim Communities.[01336-02.02] [Original text: English][B0476-XX.02]
