



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE
BOLLETTINO

HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIÈGE PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLIS
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE SALA DE IMPRENSA DA SANTA SÉ
BIURO PRASOWE STOLICY APOSTOLSKIEJ دار الصحافة التابعة للكرسي الرسولي

N. 0134

Martedì 24.02.2009

INTERVENTO DELL'OSSERVATORE PERMANENTE DELLA SANTA SEDE ALLA SESSIONE SPECIALE DEL CONSIGLIO DEI DIRITTI DELL'UOMO SULLA CRISI ECONOMICA MONDIALE (GINEVRA)

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Durante la Decima Sessione Speciale del Consiglio dei Diritti dell'Uomo circa l'impatto della crisi economica e finanziaria mondiale sulla realizzazione e il godimento effettivo dei diritti umani, svoltasi a Ginevra il 20 febbraio scorso, S.E. Mons. Silvano M. Tomasi, Osservatore Permanente della Santa Sede presso l'Ufficio delle Nazioni Unite a Ginevra, ha pronunciato l'intervento riportato qui di seguito:

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

1. As we are daily reminded by the media, the world financial crisis has created a global recession causing dramatic social consequences, including the loss of millions of jobs and the serious risk that, for many of the developing countries, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) may not be reached. The human rights of countless persons are compromised, including the right to food, water, health and decent work. Above all, when large segments of a national population see their social and economic rights frustrated, the loss of hope endangers peace. The international community has a legitimate responsibility to ask why such a situation developed; whose responsibility it is; and how a concerted solution can lead us out of the crisis and facilitate the restoration of rights. The crisis was caused, in part, by problematic behaviour of some actors in the financial and economic system, including bank administrators and those who should have been more diligent in monitoring and accountability systems; thus they bear much responsibility for the current problems. The causes of the crisis, however, are deeper.

2. Reflecting, at that time, on the 1929 crisis Pius XI observed that: "... it is obvious that not only is wealth concentrated in our times but an immense power and despotic economic dictatorship is consolidated in the hands of a few, who often are not owners but only the trustees and managing directors of invested funds which they administer according to their own arbitrary will and pleasure" (Quadragesimo Anno, n.105). He also noted that free competition had destroyed itself by relying on profit as the only criterion. There are economic, juridical and cultural dimensions of the present crisis. To engage in financial activity cannot be reduced to making easy profits, but also must include the promotion of the common good among those who lend, those who borrow, and

those who work. The lack of an ethical base has brought the crisis to low, middle and high income countries alike. The Delegation of the Holy See, Mr. President, calls for renewed "attention to the need for an ethical approach to the creation of positive partnerships between markets, civil society and States." (Pope Benedict XVI).

3. The negative consequences, however, exert a more dramatic impact on the developing world and on the most vulnerable groups in all societies. In a recent document, the World Bank estimates that, in 2009, the current global economic crisis could push an additional 53 million people below the threshold of \$2 a day. This figure is in addition to the 130 million people pushed into poverty in 2008 by the increase in food and energy prices. Such trends seriously threaten the achievement of the fight against poverty in the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. Evidence indicates that children, in particular, will suffer the most from economic hardship, and a strong increase in the infant mortality rate in poor countries is forecasted for 2009.

4. It is well known that low-income countries are heavily dependent upon two financing flows: foreign aid and migrant remittances. Both flows are expected to decline significantly over the next months, due to the worsening of the economic crisis. Despite the official reaffirmation of commitment by donors to increase Official Development Assistance (ODA) in accord with the Gleneagles agreement, currently most donors are not on track to meet their target for significant scale-up of ODA by 2010. Moreover, the most recent figures reveal a slowing down of aid flows. This results in worry that a possible direct effect of the global economic crisis will be a major reduction of aid to the poor countries. On the other hand, remittances from migrant workers already have been reduced significantly. This threatens the economic survival of entire families who derive a consistent share of their income from the transfer of funds by relatives working overseas.

5. The Delegation of the Holy See, Mr. President, would like to focus on a specific case in this crisis: its impact on the human rights of children, which exemplifies, as well, what is symptomatic of the destructive impact on all other social and economic rights. At present some important rights of poor people are heavily dependent on official aid flows and on workers' remittances. These include the right to health, education, and food. In several poor countries, in fact, educational, health and nutritional programmes are implemented with the help of aid flows from official donors. Should the economic crisis reduce this assistance, the successful completion of these programs could be threatened. By the same token, in many poor regions, entire families can afford to have their children educated and decently nourished due to remittances received from migrants. If the reduction of both aid and remittances continue, it will deprive children of the right to be educated creating a double negative consequence. Not only will we prevent children from the full exercise of their talent that, in turn, could be put to use for the common good, but also the preconditions will be established for long-range economic hardship. Lower educational investment today, in fact, will be translated into lower future growth. At the same time, poor nutrition among children significantly worsens life expectancy by increasing both child and adult mortality rates. The negative economic consequences of this go beyond the personal dimension and affect entire societies.

6. Mr. President, let me mention another consequence of the global economic crisis that could be particularly relevant for the mandate of the United Nations. All too often, periods of severe economic hardship have been characterized by the rise in power of governments with dubious commitments to democracy. The Holy See prays that such consequences will be avoided in the present crisis, since they would result in a serious threat for the diffusion of basic human rights for which this institution has so tenaciously struggled.

7. The last fifty years have witnessed some great achievements in poverty reduction. Mr. President, these achievements are at risk, and a coherent approach is required to preserve them through a renewed sense of solidarity, especially for the segments of population and for the countries more affected by the crisis. Old and recent mistakes will be repeated, however, if concerted international action is not undertaken to promote and protect all human rights and if direct financial and economic activities are not placed on an ethical road that can prioritize persons, their productivity and their rights over the greed that can result from a fixation on profit alone.

[00332-02.01] [Original text: English]

[B0134-XX.01]