



# HOLY SEE

PERMANENT OBSERVER MISSION OF THE HOLY SEE TO THE UNITED NATIONS 25 EAST 39th STREET, NEW YORK, NY 10016-0903 (212) 370-7885

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***Statement* by H.E. Archbishop Celestino Migliore  
Permanent Observer  
Head of Delegation of the Holy See**

**At the General Debate  
of the 60<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly**

**New York, 23 September 2005**

Mr President,

The summit marking the United Nations' 60th anniversary is over but, to bring it to completion, our work here must build upon its Outcome document, so as to fulfil with vision and determination the agreed package of reforms.

The Holy See, having followed the Outcome document's development closely, welcomes much of what is proposed. However, the lack of consensus on arms control and non-proliferation issues is regrettable. I should also like to add at the outset that the Holy See understands the references to both the Cairo and Beijing International Conferences and to reproductive health found in paragraphs 57 (g) and 58 (c) in the sense that it set out in its Reservations and statements of interpretation at those Conferences, that is, as applying to a holistic concept of health that does not consider abortion or access to abortion as a dimension of those terms. These caveats aside, the document is a basis for implementation and ongoing discussions on UN reform.

*1. Peace and security*

Due to the human tragedies of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, the responsibility to protect, as reflected in the Outcome document, has gained more acceptance for humanitarian reasons. Its definitive legal formulation could greatly contribute to the enrichment not only of international law but also of sincere solidarity among nations. To identify carefully and honestly the causes of such man-made disasters is indispensable in creating more timely prevention measures. Protection of those in distress and assistance to them goes hand in hand with lucid analysis and public awareness of the causes of humanitarian crises.

The silence of the Outcome document regarding disarmament and non-proliferation is worrying. Nuclear armament is simply devastating for peoples and the environment; it destroys people's lives and the substratum of every decent economy. We therefore must insist upon nuclear non-proliferation. Likewise, we must insist on complete nuclear disarmament and a strengthened IAEA verification and safeguards system. No effort should be spared to discourage not only the production of nuclear weapons but also any trade or exchange in such materials.

## *2. The role of the United Nations*

Of course, a secure world will not just be free of the menace of war: it will be one where sustainable human development is also assured, through sound global governance. But, while global governance has a logic of its own, it lacks its own ethics, something which the world's nations must supply. We live in an interdependent but fragile society and, in many places, peoples' best interests are not served well. I should like to mention here but three specific areas of ethical challenge in this regard: solidarity with the poor; the promotion of the common good; and a sustainable environment.

Small gains made in this last area remain under risk from, among other things, climate change, new diseases, the irresponsible destruction of forests, water pollution, depletion of fishing stocks, the destruction of global commons like the oceans, and so on. It is estimated that 15 out of 24 essential services provided by ecosystems are being used unsustainably. The enormity of today's environmental challenge obliges us to rethink our notions of interdependence, global cooperation and our common responsibility for the stewardship of the planet. Differences on how to address challenges should not stop agreement on the identification of specific environmental threats and common measures to tackle them.

Another core principle needs to be set out in the shape of the proper devolution of power to local levels to ensure greater effectiveness and accountability, known also as subsidiarity. The application of this principle would foster a genuine respect for the rights of nations and for the significance of culture, balancing particularism and universalism. Global governance also has to address the democratic deficit in order to assure globalisation without marginalisation.

In this context, the UN becomes the projection of the hope for peace and well being in the world. To fulfil this high calling, proper to its nature and function, will require clear characteristics of leadership, the courage of the Organisation and those who are part of it, and a common vision for its leaders, collaborators and interlocutors at every level, that they may succeed in finding the right road to achieve the goals in view.

## *3. Human rights and diversity among cultures*

On the subject of the Human Rights Council, a reform that improves upon the present arrangements is to be welcomed. International law and its institutions are vital for the application and enforcement of human rights. Likewise, we should not lose sight of the importance that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights attaches to the incorporation of its principles

into national law and to education in fostering a rights-respecting culture. Promotion and enforcement of human rights at a national level and constant attention to education will continue to be indispensable to allow them to flourish in the new system.

The international community, the happy possessor of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights since 1948, in the meantime however appears to have forgotten that not only essential human rights but also human duties underpin the Declaration. These duties establish the framework in which our rights are contained, so that the latter are not simply exercised upon a whim. The reference to duties in the UDHR reminds us that rights usually entail responsibilities; and that if we expect our own rights to be respected, we must respect the rights of others. Indeed, the Declaration's recognition of the interdependence of rights and duties was one of the key features that enabled it to win consensus from nations East and West, North and South. Today, when globalisation has rendered us more interdependent than ever, a greater sense of universal human duties would benefit the cause of peace, because awareness of our mutual responsibility acknowledges duties as essential to a social order which does not depend upon the will or power of any individual or group.

The question has resurfaced of how there can be universal rights in view of the diversity among cultures. Some maintain that all rights are culturally relative; others claim that universal rights are just instruments of a given cultural imperialism; and some believe the gulf between those two positions cannot be bridged. My delegation, however, shares the faith of the principal framers of the Universal Declaration, that certain values are so fundamental that they can find support in the moral and philosophical traditions of cultures. For that reason, such universal principles or basic human rights are undeniable. In their essential core they have to be universally recognised and must be operative "erga omnes".

To reject the idea that basic rights are relative, however, does not require one to reject a legitimate pluralism in their implementation. Quite the contrary - for pluralism is the only way to move beyond the sterile relativism-imperialism debate. The Holy See, on the basis of its own long experience in seeing how a common core of principles can take root and flourish in vastly different cultures, affirms the wisdom of the drafters of the UDHR in this respect. The framework they fashioned is flexible enough to allow for differences in emphasis and implementation, but not so malleable as to permit any basic human right to be completely eclipsed or unnecessarily subordinated for the sake of other rights. Regrettably, the legitimately pluralist approach to basic rights is sometimes forgotten, but it

must be retrieved if we are to avoid a top-down, homogenising vision of human rights.

#### *4. Religions, cultures and civilisations*

In the wake of recent acts of terrible violence, calls have come from various quarters to promote greater understanding among religions, cultures and civilisations.

The Holy See supports the initiatives in the field of inter-faith cooperation and dialogue between civilisations especially where, in the spirit of their reference to and reliance on God, they form consciences, foster common moral values, and promote inter-cultural understanding and proactive commitments. These tasks require continued evaluation with regard to motivation, policies, laws and institutions. It is the mission of civil and religious leaders to be a source of inspiration, support and guidance for all people of good will who strive towards sustainable peace.

The Holy See also understands that there is a particular type of interreligious dialogue where religious representatives and their constituents engage in discussion on the theological and spiritual tenets of their respective religions and exchange positive experiences with a view to promoting mutual understanding and respect among all. This type of dialogue does not appear to be part of the UN Charter and is therefore better left to religious experts and appropriate representatives of religions. Nevertheless, the United Nations can make a valid and important contribution to inter-faith cooperation for peace and development.

*In concluding*, Mr President, I should like to add a word of acknowledgement of the important contribution which the UN staff makes to the Organisation in its efforts to promote harmony and solidarity among peoples. Likewise, I would like to reiterate to you the best wishes and support of my delegation as you look ahead to an important and fruitful presidency of the GA.

Thank you, Mr President.