



Statement by H.E. Archbishop Bernardito Auza  
Apostolic Nuncio, Permanent Observer of the Holy See  
Seventy-first Session of the United Nations General Assembly  
First Committee **General Debate**  
New York, 11 October 2016

Mr. Chair,

The Holy See delegation extends congratulations to you and your bureau and assures full cooperation in the work of this Committee.

Weapons of all sizes and shapes must be our continuing concern. While progress has been made in limiting the arms trade, land mines and cluster munitions, the continued use of small arms and incendiary weapons is deeply disturbing. The public is rightly repulsed by the growing use of incendiary weapons, which cause excruciatingly painful burns that lead to long-term physical and psychological injury. Innocent civilians experience terrible suffering. Protocol III of the Convention on Conventional Weapons is not strong enough to end the use of these weapons. The Protocol must be strengthened to stop their use.

The international community must strive harder to control severely the use of so-called conventional weapons that clearly violate international humanitarian law. Increasingly more powerful and sophisticated conventional weapons are devastating entire communities, hospitals, schools and other civilian infrastructure and must now be treated with the same condemnation we attach to weapons of mass destruction.

The tragedies we are witnessing make it a matter of urgency for the international community to review existing classifications and definitions of what constitutes a weapon of mass destruction. The Holy See recommends therefore that discussions on weapons of mass destruction go beyond the traditional categories of nuclear, chemical, biological, and radiological weapons to include devastatingly powerful conventional weapons used to perpetrate war crimes and crimes against humanity.

This is imperative if we are to implement successfully the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in zones of conflict. United Nations' affirmations that development, peace and security and human rights are intimately connected and mutually reinforcing abound. In adopting the 2030 Agenda, Member States have expressed their determination "to foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies which are free from fear and violence. There can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development."<sup>1</sup>

This commitment can only be translated into reality if wars and conflicts are resolved, and they can only be resolved if there are strict controls on the arms trade both legal and illegal. Peace, security and stability cannot be gained strictly by the force of arms, nor by increasing military spending, since these are multidimensional objectives which include aspects that are not

---

<sup>1</sup> TRANSFORMING OUR WORLD: THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, PREAMBLE (PEACE) AND SDG 16.

linked only to the political and military sphere, but also to those of human rights, the rule of law, economic and social conditions, and the protection of the environment.

Mr. Chair,

At this session, this Committee must pay special attention to the report issued by the recently concluded Open-Ended Working Group, which was tasked with taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations. This well-balanced report, the product of serious discussion, highlighted the Working Group's recommendation that additional efforts should be pursued to elaborate concrete effective legal measures to attain and maintain a world without nuclear weapons. In reaffirming the importance of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the report noted majority support of the participating States for the General Assembly to convene a conference in 2017 "to negotiate a legally-binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading towards their total elimination."

In this respect, this Committee will need to consider seriously how to pursue a negotiating process open to all States, with a view to fulfilling the basic requirement of the NPT, which enjoins States Parties "to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race." It is incumbent upon this Committee to redouble its efforts to advance the recommendations of the Open-Ended Working Group, especially at a time when the disarmament machinery is at a standstill.

Last year, when Pope Francis addressed the General Assembly, he said: "There is urgent need to work for a world free of nuclear weapons, in full application of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, in letter and spirit, with the goal of a complete prohibition of these weapons."

The Holy See believes that nuclear deterrence and the threat of mutually assured destruction cannot be the basis for an ethics of fraternity and peaceful coexistence. We must work urgently and without ceasing to find the legal path to the elimination of all nuclear weapons.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.