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Archbishop Caccia Delivers Statement At The Third Committee On Human Rights Questions

By H. E. Archbishop Gabriele Caccia

Apostolic Nuncio and Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations

Mr. Chair,

Human dignity is the foundation of human rights. It has been placed at the heart of the human rights project, recognized not only in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but also in the numerous human rights treaties that followed. Indeed, God-given human dignity is the fundamental value of each person.

When dignity is treated as a status to be attained, or worse, conceded, rather than an intrinsic quality of the individual, the value of each person becomes contingent on status, power, and connections. When power, greed, ideology, or selfishness become the most important value and aim, “nothing holds us back from seeing others simply as objects to be exploited”[1] or, worse, discarded. When this happens, “persons are no longer seen as a paramount value to be cared for and respected, especially when they are poor and disabled, ‘not yet useful’ — like the unborn, or ‘no longer needed’ — like the elderly.”[2]

Nowhere is this more evident than in violations of the right to life. Without it, no other rights can be exercised or enjoyed. It is deeply troubling that, even within the United Nations, the right to life is invoked in the defense of abortion, which directly ends the life of the most vulnerable members of our human family, unborn children.[3] Nor can it honestly be described as truly serving women, many of whom are pressured by both people and circumstances, and are themselves often morally, physically, and psychologically harmed by abortion. In truth, it is a cheaper, easier solution than creating a culture that respects women, accompanies them in their needs, and facilitates family life.

No less concerning is the growing advocacy around the world for the legislation of assisted suicide. Far too often cloaked in the language of choice, troubling stories abound wherever it has been legalized. What choice is there for the disabled persons who cannot get the

support they need, the elderly who have been abandoned, the poor without necessary resources for treatment, and those struggling with mental illness who have lost hope? When the State, the medical profession, and society at large are unwilling to preserve and protect life but willing to “assist” people end their lives, it is clear that the fundamental value of the person has been lost. This is a culture of death and despair, not a culture that respects dignity and rights.

Mr. Chair,

The Holy See also considers the death penalty to be a violation of the fundamental principle of the right to life. The State’s obligation to protect its citizens, including through the impartial and efficient administration of justice, is essential to the common good. Yet improvements in the penal system in many States “are sufficient to defend human lives against an aggressor and to protect public order and the safety of persons.”^[4] For this reason, authorities should not resort to means that are unnecessary and undermine the right to life. This is true not only to avoid miscarriages of justice against the innocent, but also for the guilty, whose lives, however misused, still have intrinsic value. Although the death penalty is not yet expressly prohibited by international law, it is however incompatible with the right to life.

Mr. Chair,

The Holy See calls upon all States to respect the dignity of all human persons and to protect the right to life at all stages, as a responsibility of good governance and as a key to the building of a just society. Until the protection of life from conception to natural death is realized for all, the project of human rights cannot be considered fulfilled. It is our fervent hope that one day this protection will be enshrined in law and realized in practice throughout the world.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[1] Pope Francis, Message for the Sixth World Day of the Poor, 13 November 2022.

[2] Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, No. 18.

[3] See, e.g., Human Rights Committee, General comment No. 36: Article 6 right to life, CCPR/C/GC/36, 3 September 2019.

[4] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae*, N. 56.



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