



Address by His Excellency Archbishop Ivan Jurkovič,
Permanent Representative of the Holy See to the United Nations and Other International
Organizations in Geneva, at the Seminar on “**Promoting Peace Together**”, organized by the
World Council of Churches and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue
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Allow me, at the outset, to greet the organizers of this Seminar on the theme of “Promoting Peace Together” and to thank you for inviting the Mission of the Holy See here in Geneva to offer its unique perspective on this most compelling of subjects.

It is quite fitting that our present meeting is held in the WCC, just days before the first anniversary of the historic visit here of Pope Francis, who called the ecumenical movement, a “path of a reconciled communion aimed at the visible manifestation of fraternity that even now unites believers” (Pope Francis, *Address at the Ecumenical Meeting*, 21 June 2018).

The interconnectedness of today’s global world, in its intricate net of economic, cultural and institutional relations, becomes more and more apparent every day. Of course, our increasing interconnectivity has the potential to lead to violent clashes or friendly, fraternal cooperation aiming at the common good. Thus, it is all the more important for us, who trace the common roots and destiny of human beings in the Plan of Almighty God, our common Father, to strive toward this friendship, by enkindling feelings of “human fraternity that embraces all human beings, unites them and renders them equal”.¹

With this perspective in mind, I would like to offer the following considerations for our reflection on how Papal Diplomacy facilitates the promotion of fraternity in today’s world.

Especially in the second millennium of the history of the Catholic Church, certain historical and political dynamics provided the Successors of the Apostle Peter to the Episcopal See of Rome, which is to say the Holy See, with its particular international legal personality, or “international subjectivity”. This, as perhaps the most obvious example,

¹ His Holiness Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahmad Al-Tayyib: Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together, Abu Dhabi, 4 February 2019.

includes the right of the Holy See to send and receive envoys to and from other States. The Popes, then, have been international actors within the global community, in the modern sense of the term, since its inception in the fifteenth century to the present.

It is primarily in his responsibility as the Supreme Pastor of the Catholic Church, and more recently as the Sovereign of Vatican City State, that the Pope has utilized this providential legal status, specifically through what was to become the diplomatic service of the Holy See.

Pontifical Representatives, as the Representatives of the Supreme Pontiff and the Holy See are called exercise their proper diplomatic role in a bilateral setting, where they act as a full-fledged ambassadors of the Holy See accredited to a particular country, with the traditional title of Apostolic Nuncio or, in the multilateral fora, as Permanent Representatives or, as in my case, Permanent Observers, of the Holy See to the International Organizations. In either position, they represent the person of the Holy Father as head of the Catholic Church, expressing in this way the care for all the churches and for all humanity that is proper of the Successor of Peter.

The task of promoting dialogue in a global community, of which the Catholic family is a part, and which includes so much diversity, even within the same religious tradition, is indeed a great exercise of fostering fraternity and peace.

Speaking specifically of its diplomatic work, first it must be noted that the Holy See, in its bilateral relations with States and in the multilateral fora, unlike other diplomacies, is more concerned with the life of the peoples than to the everchanging environment of political life. Even in the case of a radical change in government, the Holy See looks more to the welfare of the people than to the ideological convictions that dominate the political arena. This is also the reason why the Holy See, in its long history of diplomatic relationships, has never unilaterally severed diplomatic relations with any State.

Where it can be considered mutually advantageous, the Holy See enters into bilateral treaties, traditionally called "concordats", by which it tries to find areas of common concern and collaboration between Church and State, and to ensure the freedom of the Catholic community of that particular country to worship and organize itself according to its own rules and in harmony with the laws of the State.

By signing agreements, the Holy See contributes to fostering the principle of the right to freedom of religion or belief, as recognized by the international community. And the aspiration to achieve and to ensure freedom of the Catholic Church is never sought against or despite the freedom of other religious communities, which often see in the

content of these instruments a good pattern to follow. Freedom of religion is at the same time “the basis and the limit” of the elaboration of concordats for the Holy See.

Among his different tasks, moreover, the Apostolic Nuncio is also called to help the Catholic Churches of the country where he is present to promote dialogue with other Christian confessions and other religions (Cfr. CIC 364, 6) and to participate in the efforts of the international community in promoting the peace and wellbeing of all human family (Can. 364,5).

This last point brings us here in Geneva, where precisely 100 years ago the lines of history came together to design a new worldwide approach to deal with global problems by creating a sort of ever standing International Congress of all “powers” which constituted the first attempt to what then became the United Nations.

Throughout the last century, the Holy See, as a full member of the international community and according to its particular nature and primarily spiritual mission, has joined different organizations, either as a member, or as an observer.

Its aim is to promote the “human dimension” or, in other words, “the centrality of the human person and his/her integral development” within the narrative of the world’s agreement and decisions. Once again, its policy follows from the ideal of fraternity among human beings, which affirms that all and each partake in the same nature, created by God, are called to the same eternal destiny, and therefore are endowed with an inherent dignity. Within this perspective, the freedom of religion or belief is also one of the most fundamental bases to ensure that human dignity is respected, promoted and able to flourish.

In conclusion,

Particularly in the recent historical period, the Holy See’s diplomacy has remained faithful to the specific aims outlined above in its diplomatic activity. As Pope Francis reminded us during this year’s address to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See: *“This fidelity to the spiritual impels the Pope – and consequently the Holy See – to show concern for the whole human family and its needs, including those of the material and social order. Nonetheless, the Holy See has no intention of interfering in the life of States; it seeks instead to be an attentive listener, sensitive to issues involving humanity, out of a sincere and humble desire to be at the service of every man and woman.”*

Thank you for your attention.