



Statement by His Excellency Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva at the 19<sup>th</sup> Session of the Human Rights Council - Item 3: "Violence against Children" Geneva, 8 March 2012

Madam President,

The Delegation of the Holy See wishes to express its deep concern, as already has been shared by other delegations, regarding the plight of innocent children whose physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being have been seriously wounded as a result of violence to which they have been subjected. As the United Nations Secretary General Mr. Ban Ki-moon noted during his address at a special event to encourage ratification of Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, "Childhood is a time of innocence and learning, a time for building character and finding a safe route to adulthood. But the sad truth is that too many children in today's world suffer appalling abuse."<sup>1</sup>

While the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children reported on positive developments in several regions of the world, she also details many persistent challenges to be confronted in order to assure the safety and well-being of children in all sectors and circumstances of social life and welfare. Some 300,000 children are involved in more than 30 conflicts worldwide, and they are used as combatants, messengers, porters, cooks, and for forced sexual relations. Most of them are brutally recruited. Some 115 million of the world's 215 million child laborers are caught in hazardous work. Most regrettably, studies have demonstrated that violence against children can take place in many settings: at home, in school or other educational settings, in institutions or other residential care settings for children whose parents cannot provide adequate and appropriate care, in the workplace and in prisons or other types of detention centres. Added to these traditional risks of abuse are the new technologies that, as demonstrated by evidence-based research, often bombard children with damaging and frightening images and information or naively participate in fora that are manipulated by persons interested in preying on such children for selfish and harmful motives. <sup>2</sup> Sexual violence against children is particularly disturbing and requires heightened attention, not only from State governments and law enforcement agencies, but also from each and every component of society, since all members of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Remarks of UN Secretary General, 27 May 2010, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/Newpushtoprotectchildren.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> cf. *Lost in Cyber World – a project explaining: the dangers harbored by the Internet - Information for parents and educators*, IN VIA Project, Social Network of the Archdiocese of Berlin, September 2011.

human family must share in the responsibility to protect our children, by helping them enjoy their God-given human dignity, and accompanying them as they mature in a caring and wholesome manner.

Madame President, this Delegation is acutely aware of the very regrettable actions perpetrated by some religious ministers who have betrayed the very values, which they preach on behalf of their respective faith traditions, by committing aberrant acts of sexual abuse against children. My Delegation wishes to inform that the Catholic Church continued to develop and adopt decisive aimed at carefully monitoring the actions taken by church-related structures to help to prevent future occurrences of sexual abuse against children within religious settings. Indeed, the Church has stated on numerous occasions that, without prejudice to the sacramental internal forum, the prescriptions of civil law regarding the reporting of such crimes to the designated authority should always be followed.<sup>3</sup> During a recent high-level meeting on this topic, held in Rome, a new internet-based “Center for Child Protection” was launched with the aim of assisting Catholic Church-related institutions in educating clergy and other church-related personnel in the prevention of child abuse.<sup>4</sup>

In a recent address to bishops from the United States of America, Pope Benedict XVI “acknowledge[d] personally the suffering inflicted on the victims [of sexual abuse] and the honest efforts made both to ensure the safety of our children and to deal appropriately and transparently with allegations as they arise.” The Holy Father further expressed the “... hope that the Church’s conscientious efforts to confront this reality will help the broader community to recognize the causes, true extent and devastating consequences of sexual abuse, and to respond effectively to this scourge which affects every level of society,” and noted that, “... just as the Church is rightly held to exacting standards in this regard, all other institutions, without exception, should be held to the same standards.”<sup>5</sup>

Madame President, this Council, and society as a whole, should not deceive itself into thinking that sexual abuse against minors is restricted to some institutions. It has insidiously infiltrated all elements of society and most often occurs within the family, the local neighborhood, and the child’s immediate social circle. It must honestly be acknowledged and effectively prevented in order to safeguard the safety and the physical and emotional health of children who, in turn, constitute the future of society.

---

<sup>3</sup> cf. Circular letter to assist Episcopal Conferences in developing Guidelines for dealing with cases of sexual abuse of minors perpetrated by clerics (May 3, 2011), [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20110503\\_abuso-minori\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20110503_abuso-minori_en.html).

<sup>4</sup> cf., <http://elearning-childprotection.com/>

<sup>5</sup> “Address of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI to the Bishops of the United States of America on their ‘Ad Limina’ Visit,” Vatican City, 26 November 2011, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches/2011/november/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20111126\\_bishops-usa\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2011/november/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20111126_bishops-usa_en.html)