



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 19th Session of the Human Rights Council - Item 3 - Adequate Housing
Geneva, 23 March 2012

Madam President,

Let me begin by thanking Ms. Raquel Rolnik, Special Rapporteur on *Adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living and the right of non-discrimination in this thereon*¹, for her report to the Council focused on women's right to adequate housing.

The Report rightly points out the progress and legal developments carried out in various countries and aimed at facilitating the full realization of this right by women. In turn, the Report shows concern about the still existing loopholes and socio-cultural situations that in some regions continue to hinder the women's full enjoyment of the right to adequate housing, to their status as mother, wife, widow, orphan or to their equal treatment with men in the distribution of family possessions, of land and property in general.

Therefore, the legal protection of a woman's right to adequate housing is of interest to us all and now it requires specific measures because in many places for various reasons women are heads of household, have the sole responsibility for the education, upbringing and support of their children. This situation is most dramatic when the lack of adequate housing comes together with factors such as poverty and unemployment which in turn force many women to migrate and leave their children not only without a home but also under the care of others.

To promote women's right to adequate housing is also a way to combat discrimination against women² and domestic violence. In most cases women and children are the most affected by these scourges. In many contexts, both the woman and her child are forced to endure inhumane treatment just because mainly due to lack of a place where to live and be protected.

Madam President,

The Holy See is convinced *"that a house is much more than just a roof, but the place where a person realizes and lives her own life, but also where she builds in some way, her deepest*

¹ A/HRC/53

² Cf *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (art. 14, 2 h).

*identity and her relations with others.*³ It has therefore kept the subject of housing constant among its concerns. My Delegation, therefore, reaffirms the general principle of the right to housing for all as a fundamental human right⁴ and, in this regard, it calls for greater protection and legal guarantees for women at the moment of pregnancy and maternity so they may enjoy the full right to adequate housing. This prerequisite reflects the fact that in these circumstances both the mother and the newborn child are exposed to increased vulnerability and thus necessitate particular assistance.⁵

Similarly, this Delegation agrees that priority should be given to women with children and to families where the father is away for work when the State develops programs of construction, distribution and allocation of housing. It recommends as well that in the process of building these houses the State should provide basic social services like health, education, drinking water and a healthy environment so as to allow women and their children develop a normal life.⁶ The Holy See also recommends ensuring, particularly in the “*Forced Evictions*” cases, that *re-locations* be put in practice taking into account the mandatory value of families’ unity. More we recommend ensuring a new arrangement that will guarantee adequate housing condition especially for women with children granting accessibility and proximity of school and child care services.

Finally, my Delegation also urges all those responsible for, and involved in the search for solution of the housing problem in general and of adequate housing for women in particular “*to make their contribution in order to have adequate policies to deal with the more urgent situations and to remove the obstacles that impede finding the specific economic, legal and social rules capable to promote more favourably the resolution of these problems.*”⁷

Thank you, Madam President.

³ Cf John Paul II, Letter to Hon. Cardinal Roger Etchegaray, President of the Pontifical Commission “Justice and Peace”, December 8, 1987).

⁴ Cf Universal Declaration of Human Rights (art. 25.1), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (art. 11.1), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Article. 5, and iii) I United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat I), Vancouver, 1976; II United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), Istanbul, 1996.

⁵ Cf Universal Declaration of Human Rights (art. 25.2).

⁶ Cf Convention on the Rights of the Child (art. 27, 1 and 3).

⁷ Cf John Paul II, Letter to Hon. Cardinal Roger Etchegaray, President of the Pontifical Commission “Justice and Peace”, December 8, 1987).