



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 20<sup>th</sup> Session of the Human Rights Council  
Item 3: “Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women”  
*Geneva, 26 June 2012*

Madam President,

Violence against women remains an inescapable reality in too many places. Structures and attitudes of discrimination justify violence against women and impunity for their abuse too often perpetuates the problem. The daily fear of violence for attending school, the rape of a young girl with disabilities, and the forced marriage of a raped girl each is a recent example that represents practices, laws, and cultural conditioning and are manifestations of institutionalized and tolerated discrimination and violence against women. The Delegation of the Holy See thanks the Special Rapporteur for her efforts in promoting the advancement of women’s rights. It is of the utmost importance that States establish mechanisms for the protection of women from discriminatory practices and perceptions in law and in practice in order to uphold human rights.

The Holy See acknowledges the unfortunate reality of discrimination and violence against women and recalls the words of Pope Benedict XVI: “There are places and cultures where women are discriminated against or undervalued for the sole fact of being women...where acts of violence are consummated in regard to women...Faced with such grave and persistent phenomena the Christian commitment appears all the more urgent so that everywhere it may promote a culture that recognizes the dignity that belongs to women, in law and in concrete reality.”<sup>1</sup>

Madam President,

Times of political transition are prime opportunities to study the de jure and de facto condition of women. As we have seen throughout history and most recently in the Arab Spring in the Middle East and North Africa, are times wrought with violence and instability.

Due to the destabilizing nature of political turmoil, the Holy See stresses the importance of women’s roles in the family. “The family is the vital cell of society” and women, as equal participants in marriage as spouses and mothers, are fundamental to

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Benedict XVI. "International Convention On: "Woman and Man, the 'Humanum' in Its Entirety," 9 Feb. 2008. [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches/2008/february/documents/hf\\_benxvi\\_spe\\_20080209\\_donna-uomo\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2008/february/documents/hf_benxvi_spe_20080209_donna-uomo_en.html)

the preservation of the institution of family and, therefore, society<sup>2</sup>. “Every social model that intends to serve the good of man must not overlook the centrality and social responsibility of the family”, which includes all societies that are committed to the promotion and realization of human rights<sup>3</sup>. A consideration of women in the family cannot be ignored as it will supplement any attentive study of improvements in women’s rights in the political, public, legal and social spheres.

It is essential to eliminate discrimination and violence through effective frameworks for the protection of women’s rights and the empowerment of women in any context of political transition, economic crisis or otherwise. These structures must respond to the cross-cutting nature of sex-based discrimination against women including those with disabilities and those of particular religions or beliefs.

Madam President,

Unstable situations marked by violence present the risk of particularly aggressive behaviour against the more defenseless groups of society. A grave concern of the Holy See is that the protection of women from violence be provided in these contexts, with special concern for women who are human rights defenders. Judicial impunity, cultural and social norms that tolerate discrimination and fail to address violent acts such as female infanticide or sex-selective abortion must be addressed and rejected.

It is necessary to construct a reality in which men and women are treated equally, viewed equally and freed from the undignified treatment of discriminatory practices. The dignity of each person, women and men, requires that just institutions and fair societies exist for its promotion.

Madam President,

Considering the “well-rooted and profound diversity between the masculine and the feminine and their vocation to reciprocity and complementarity, to collaboration and to communion,”<sup>4</sup> the delegation of the Holy See reaffirms the intrinsic truth of the equal dignity of men and women and therefore the necessity to eliminate any discrimination and violence against women.

Thank you, Madam President.

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<sup>2</sup> Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 11: AAS 58 (1966), 848.

<sup>3</sup> “The Family, the Vital Cell of Society.” *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004. 97.

<sup>4</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, “International Convention On: Woman and Man, the ‘Humanum’ in Its Entirety”, 9 February 2008.