



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 21st Session of the Human Rights Council - Item 3: Interactive dialogue
with the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery
Geneva, 13 September 2012

Madam President,

The Holy See Delegation warmly welcomes Dr. Gulnara Shahinian, Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences.

Regrettably, women and children are usually the subject of slavery and its contemporary forms to a large extent, as they often have less personal and material means. We must denounce the existing discrimination and slavery on the grounds of belonging to other caste, religion, social class or ethnicity. The root causes for these new forms of slavery are manifold: poverty, lack of education, complicity of members of the family, pressure on the children, armed conflicts and violence, among others.

In addition, there exist sexual harassments and violence against the victims of the new forms of slavery. These problems are both the cause and the consequence of a deficit of education and a lack of self-esteem.

My Delegation regrets the existence of the so-called servile marriage in which one spouse is reduced to the condition of a mere object, on which it is possible to exercise some or all rights derived from ownership.

We must remember that all human beings have an inalienable and inherent dignity. No human being should be treated as an object or a commodity. Such attitude cannot be justified in any way, let alone for an eventual improvement in the economic or family situation. Child marriage, as indicated by the Special Rapporteur, implies that one spouse or both do not have the minimum marriageable age.

My Delegation welcomes the comments made by the Special Rapporteur on the need for a full and free consent to the marriage and the indication that there should be a minimum age to celebrate it a free and with full consent.

The Social Doctrine of the Church, about family and marriage: *“The family has its foundation in the free choice of the spouses to unite themselves in marriage, in respect for the meaning and values of this institution that does not depend on man but on God himself”*. Marriage requires free consent, both from the man and the woman; therefore, forced, servile, by correspondence or sham marriage (wife or husband married in order to legalize their immigration status) are also invalid.

In conclusion, my Delegation fully supports the efforts to combat and prevent forced marriage so as not to violate or limit the rights of any parties, husband and wife. We also support the increased investments in education for girls subjected to forced marriages or at risk, including those already married and pregnant.

My Delegation would like to encourage the international community and the Special Rapporteur to:

- Strengthen the efforts towards the eradication of corporal punishment, marriage without mutual full consent and domestic violence;
- Continue to improve health and education systems, giving access to all regardless of their economic, religious, social or ethnic background;
- Establish care programs for victims of servile marriages through education, shelter and medical or psychological support;
- Safeguarding the family and marriage as the conjugal union between a man and a woman based on the free consent of the spouses.

Thank you, Madam President.