



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 4: Interactive Dialogue with the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic
Geneva, 17 September 2012

Madam President,

The Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic and other sources of information document all too well the results of months of violence in that country: thousands, some estimate 30,000, of victims who have lost their lives and many others who have been wounded; city neighbourhoods destroyed; more than a quarter of a million made refugees; 1.2 million internally displaced people; classes cancelled indefinitely for tens of thousands of children. Above all, social trust and civil conviviality have been broken. This violent conflict shows the futility of war as a means to resolve disagreements. It is appropriate that this Council should adopt the perspective of the victims in its resolve to promote human rights and to uphold humanitarian law. Respect for the fundamental rights of the victims of this conflict is, in fact, the road that can lead to healing human relations and to peace, an indispensable prerequisite for negotiations and an effective response to the expectations of the people for a democratic new beginning.

The Holy See has been following the worsening of the conflict in Syria with great attention and deep concern given the risk of destabilization in the entire region and the total disregard of civilian population; has reiterated its rejection of violence from whatever source it may come; and regrets the loss of so many human lives and family tragedies. The voice of the Holy Father Benedict XVI, a pilgrim of peace in the area, has condemned without any ambiguity the use of violence: “Even though it seems hard to find solutions to the various problems that affect the region,” he said, “we cannot resign ourselves to violence and to the aggravation of tensions. The commitment to dialogue and to reconciliation must be a priority for all the parties concerned and must be supported by the international community.”¹ A stable peace in the Middle East is an important benefit for the whole world. With God’s gift of peace, local people can use their talents for the development and progress of their countries, enjoy their right to a decent life there, and avoid the misery and suffering of forced uprooting and exile.

¹ Angelus, Sunday 9 September 2012.

Solidarity with the people of Syria and, by extension, to the whole of the Middle East, implies that the international community should put aside selfish interests, support the political process for a cessation of violence and for an orderly and inclusive participation of all groups in the management of the country as citizens of equal dignity and responsibility. An additional requirement appears urgent to make solidarity effective and genuine: humanitarian assistance to all displaced people and other victims of bombardments and indiscriminate destruction, especially to children. Then, to the importation of arms, the firm and common will for peace and the importation of ideas for reconciliation should be substituted. Furthermore, journalists should report on this situation with fairness and complete information so that public opinion may more easily grasp the futility of violence and how in the long run it doesn't benefit anyone. Media, too, can help build a culture of peace and point at the benefits of reconciliation.

The wave of protests, peaceful on the part of most of the participants, that have characterized what has been called the Arab Spring, stemmed from the deep desire, especially of younger people, for greater freedom, better employment, a real participation in public life. To frustrate these aspirations through the manipulation of power and forms of control will have a lasting damage and miss a historical opportunity for progress.

Madam President,

The people of Syria and the Middle East deserve support and solidarity in their moment of need. The promotion of all human rights is an effective and indispensable strategy for the success of their struggle for peace and social conviviality.

Thank you, Madam President.