



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 23rd Session of the Human Rights Council
Item 2: Interactive Dialogue with High Commissioner
Geneva, 27 May 2013

Mr. President,

My Delegation congratulates Madam High Commissioner for her presentation as well as for the activities of her office for the promotion, recognition and implementation of human rights.

Mr. President,

The serious violations of the right to freedom of religion¹ in general and the recent continuing discrimination and systematic attacks inflicted on some Christian communities in particular, deeply concern the Holy See. Credible research has reached the shocking conclusion that every year an estimate of more than 100,000 Christians are killed because of some relation to their faith². Many others are subjected to forced displacement, to the destruction of their places of worship, to rape and to the abduction of their leaders – as it recently happened in the case of Bishops *Yohanna Ibrahim* and *Boulos Yaziji*, in Aleppo (Syria).

Several of these acts have been perpetrated in parts of the Middle East, Africa and Asia, the fruit of bigotry, intolerance, terrorism and some exclusionary laws. In addition, in some Western countries³ where historically the Christian presence has been an integral part of society, a trend emerges that tends to marginalize Christianity in public life, to ignore historic and social contributions and even to restrict the ability of faith communities to carry out social charitable services.⁴

¹ Cfr. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, (art. 18); *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, (art. 18).

² <http://www.noticiacristiana.com/sociedad/persecuciones/2011/06/cada-5-minutos-un-cristiano-muere-a-causa-de-su-fe-dice-un-estudio.html>; Paper presented at Notre Dame University, November 2012 *World Christian Trends* by David B. Barrett and Todd M. Johnson (William Carey Library) *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 2nd edition, by David B. Barrett, George T. Kurian, and Todd M. Johnson (Oxford University Press); *Atlas of Global Christianity* edited by Todd M. Johnson and Kenneth R. Ross (Edinburgh University Press).

³ "Report 2012. Europe: *Legal Restrictions Affecting Christians*". Dr. Gudrun KUGLER, Mts, Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians in Europe. Vienna 2013.

⁴ Cfr. "In many countries Christians are deprived of fundamental rights and sidelined from public life; in other countries they endure violent attacks against their churches and their homes. At times they are forced to leave the countries they have helped to build because of persistent tensions and policies which frequently relegate them to being second-class spectators of national life. In other parts of the world, we see policies aimed at marginalizing the role of religion in the life of society". (Address of His Holiness

Mr. President,

The Human Rights Council has recognized that "*religion, spirituality and belief may and can contribute to the promotion of the inherent dignity and worth of the human person.*"⁵ The Christian religion, as other faith-communities, is "*at the service of the true good of humanity.*"⁶ In fact "*Christian communities, with their patrimony of values and principles, have contributed much to making individuals and peoples aware of their identity and their dignity.*"⁷

In this connection, my Delegation considers it useful to recall some pertinent data on the current services to the human family carried out in the world by the Catholic Church without any distinction of religion or race. In the field of education, it runs 70,544 kindergartens with 6,478,627 pupils; 92,847 primary schools with 31,151,170 pupils; 43,591 secondary schools with 17,793,559 pupils. The Church also educates 2,304,171 high school pupils, and 3,338,455 university students. The Church's worldwide charity and healthcare centres include: 5,305 hospitals; 18,179 dispensaries; 547 Care Homes for people with leprosy; 17,223 Homes for the elderly, or the chronically ill or people with a disability; 9,882 orphanages; 11,379 crèches; 15,327 marriage counseling; 34,331 social rehabilitation centres and 9,391 other kinds of charitable institutions. To such data about social action activity, there should be added the assistance services carried out in refugee camps and to internally displaced people and the accompaniment of these uprooted persons.⁸

Mr. President,

Allow me to congratulate the Delegations, like that of Italy, that took the floor to defend the right to the freedom of religion of every person, and of Christians in particular, and to welcome the firm position of the Prime Minister of Bangladesh regarding proposals to introduce an anti-blasphemy law in her country. In conclusion, I wish to quote Pope Francis' hope that "*... civil authorities everywhere respect the right to publicly express one's faith and to accept without prejudice the contribution that Christianity continues to offer to the culture and society of our time.*"⁹

Thank you, Mr. President.

Pope Benedict XVI to the members of the Diplomatic Corps, January 9, 2012); "*It even happens that believers, and Christians in particular, are prevented from contributing to the common good by their educational and charitable institutions.*" (Address of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI to the members of the Diplomatic Corps, January 7, 2013).

⁵ Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, *World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance*, n. 8.

⁶ Address of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI to the members of the Diplomatic Corps, January 8, 2009.

⁷ Benedict XVI, Message for the Celebration of World Peace Day, 1 January 2011, N. 7.

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http://www.fides.org/en/stats/32421VATICAN_WORLD_MISSION_DAY_CATHOLIC_CHURCH_STATISTICS_2012

⁹ Message on behalf of the Holy Father Francis to Cardinal Angelo Scola, on the occasion of the XVII centenary celebrations the Edict of Milan (that opened the way to religious freedom). "*... delle autorità civili, sia ovunque rispettato il diritto all'espressione pubblica della propria fede e sia accolto senza pregiudizi il contributo che il cristianesimo continua ad offrire alla cultura e alla società del nostro tempo.*"