



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 – Urgent debate on the deteriorating situation of human rights in the Syrian Arab Republic and the recent killings in Al Qusayr
Geneva, 29 May 2013

Mr. President,

Violence in Syria has proven once again that it is the terrain of the violation of all human rights. Lives have been destroyed by the tens of thousands; a million and half persons have been forced to flee abroad as refugees; more than four million people have lost their homes; and civilians have been targeted by warring parties in total disregard of humanitarian law. This enormous national tragedy risks to intensify regional and global conflicts, to transform ambitions for political power into ethnic and religious fundamentalist confrontations, to melt down the entire country.

The way forward is not by a military intensification of the armed conflict but by dialogue and reconciliation, a process that the proposed diplomatic conference can help to promote, if the political will is there to sustain it. An immediate ceasefire will stop the bloodshed, a useless and destructive tragedy that mortgages the future of Syria and the Middle East. As Pope Francis said: “How much blood has been shed! And how much suffering must there still be before a political solution to the crisis will be found?”¹ The Holy See all along has insisted that only peaceful negotiations will lead to an acceptable solution of the crisis and that participation, in an eventual government and in positions of responsibility, by representatives of all citizens can ensure a constructive and lasting peaceful coexistence of all component communities of Syrian society.

Children in refugee camps and in conflict areas, traumatized and forcibly deprived of their rights, suffer the most of the consequences of violence and call for generous solidarity on the part of the international community. Only in this way can they and their families hope again for a normal existence. In particular unaccompanied minors deserve specific attention and assistance to prevent that they fall victims of trafficking and other forms of exploitation.

¹ *Urbi et Orbi* Message of Pope Francis, Easter 2013.

Silencing the guns is the priority. Besides, the necessity of overcoming any pessimism toward undertaking and achieving successful negotiations should be seen against the death caused daily by the use of guns, a cost the people of Syria have already paid too much. This moral responsibility is unavoidable and it calls for a rejection of personal revenge and of inordinate ambitions of dominance by any group.

In conclusion, Mr. President, the Holy See Delegation restates its call for negotiations and for putting an end to violence. People should take precedence over power and revenge. Their unspeakable suffering must not be ignored by any of the parties involved as they are all called to act now for peace, reconstruction and a new beginning of human relations based on human rights and the common interest of the one human family.

Thank you, Mr. President.