



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 20th Special Session of the Human Rights Council on the Human Rights Situation in the Central African Republic
Geneva, 20 January 2014

Mr. President,

The Delegation of the Holy See is grateful for the initiative taken by the Council to urgently review the human rights situation in the Central African Republic. The social and political situation in the country is deteriorating on a daily basis and has resulted in utter disrespect for the rights to life and dignity of countless children, women, and men. The firsthand, direct testimony of the Catholic bishops of the country confirms it as they write: “For the most part, the country has plunged into desolation; the roads are not maintained; the hospitals have been destroyed or have been deprived of medicines and trained staff; persons living with HIV/AIDS have no more access to anti-retroviral medicines; schools no longer are standing; ... murder has become a banal and trivial act; we are falling into a culture of violence and death.”¹

My Delegation welcomes the decision to expedite the appointment of an Independent Expert on Human Rights in the Central African Republic. An objective analysis of the situation is urgent. Some voices in the international community claim that a religious war is underway. Religious leaders in the country, however, inform us that there are no clear-cut confessional lines among the conflicting parties. They maintain that the seeds for the present conflict were sown many years ago and are related to a constant cycle of exploiting the poorest sectors of society, of corruption among the most powerful, and of impunity for crimes committed especially when they were directed against the most vulnerable. Mr. President, placing the blame on religion for the conflict situation in the Central African Republic merely deflects the attention and energy of the international community and the citizens of the country itself from dealing with the true roots of the problem.

In fact, leaders of the major faith traditions in the country are urging their respective followers to set aside the desire for vengeance, to avoid any inducements toward political or economic corruption, to engage in the reconstruction of national

¹ “Reconstruisons Ensemble Notre Pays : Dans La Paix !”, *Message des évêques de Centrafrique aux fidèles chrétiens, aux hommes et aux femmes de bonne volonté*, 08 January 2014.

unity, and to initiate a process of rebuilding the social fabric of society and of seeking reconciliation on the levels of inter-personal relationships, local communities, and of the nation as a whole.

Integral human development is the best strategy to restore and preserve the enjoyment of human rights in conflict-torn countries such as the Central African Republic. For this reason, the Delegation of the Holy See urges this Council to promote a prompt, expanded, and effective engagement of the international community, of the African Union in particular, in responding to the political and humanitarian crisis in the country and to assure ongoing provision and monitoring of development cooperation in order to avoid a recurrence of the conflicts that have led to the present-day crisis. Allow me to conclude with the recent words of Pope Francis: "I think above all of the Central African Republic, where much suffering has been caused as a result of the country's tensions, which have frequently led to devastation and death ... I express my hope that the concern of the international community will help to bring an end to violence, a return to the rule of law and guaranteed access to humanitarian aid, also in the remotest parts of the country." ²

Thank you, Mr. President.

² http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/speeches/2014/january/documents/papa-francesco_20140113_corpo-diplomatico_en.html