



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 25<sup>th</sup> Session of the Human Rights Council

Item 3: Reports of the Special Rapporteurs on Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography; Violence Against Children; and Children in Armed Conflict *Geneva, 13 March 2014*

Mr. President,

The reports of the Special Rapporteurs dealing with various forms of violence and exploitation directed against children form a tragic litany of willful harm to the dignity, wellbeing, and future development of the world's most innocent and vulnerable citizens. My delegation is left with particularly serious concerns having read in one report after another that the international community possesses little understanding of the dimensions of such problems as the sale of children, child prostitution, child pornography and the horrendous violence against those affected by albinism. In the present day and age, we surely need to develop the political will, analytical capacity, and firm commitment to effective action, at the individual, community, national, regional and global levels, to address, adjudicate, and eliminate these crimes.

In a recent address to the new Ambassadors accredited to the Holy See on the occasion of the presentation of their credentials, Pope Francis encouraged more a focused and intense attention by governments to the "scourge" of human trafficking which he labeled a "crime against humanity", "a true form of slavery, unfortunately more and more widespread, which concerns every country, even the most developed." He made a further appeal, "People of good will, whether or not they profess religious beliefs, must not allow these women, men and children to be treated as objects, to be deceived, raped, often sold and resold for various purposes, and in the end either killed or left devastated in mind and body, only to be finally thrown away or abandoned."<sup>1</sup>

The Special Rapporteurs pointed to similar patterns of vulnerability that constitute the root causes of abuse perpetrated against children. Such conditions include abject poverty, economic and social crises, civil and political conflicts, and the widespread violence resulting from such disorders. My delegation noted with particular interest that family breakdown was acknowledged as a serious contributing factor to the violence against children. For many years, the Holy See has made efforts to alert the international community to the alarming fact that the number of broken and troubled families is "on the rise, not simply because of the weakening sense of belonging so typical of today's

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/francesco/speeches/2013/december/documents/papa-francesco\\_20131212\\_credenziali-nuovi-ambasciatori\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/speeches/2013/december/documents/papa-francesco_20131212_credenziali-nuovi-ambasciatori_en.html)

world, but also because of the adverse conditions in which many families are forced to live, even to the point where they lack basic means of subsistence.”<sup>2</sup> For this reason, the international community must acknowledge the need to enact suitable policies aimed at supporting, assisting, and strengthening the family. The promotion of strong family values and provision of social and economic help to families in particular need will, at the same time, prove effective in reducing domestic violence and sexual abuse, which regrettably is the most frequently occurring cause of harm to women and children.

Mr. President, with regard to the situation of children in armed conflict, my delegation insists that “full respect for humanitarian law remains essential. It is unacceptable that unarmed civilians, especially children, become targets.”<sup>3</sup> Together with all people of good will, we are deeply grieved by the fact that the youngest members of society so often are robbed of their childhood and forced to become soldiers, or are kidnapped, wounded and killed in armed conflicts.

Thank you, Mr. President.

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/francesco/speeches/2014/january/documents/papa-francesco\\_20140113\\_corpo-diplomatico\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/speeches/2014/january/documents/papa-francesco_20140113_corpo-diplomatico_en.html)

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*