



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 26th Session of the Human Rights Council
Item 3 - Independent Expert on Human Rights and International Solidarity
Geneva, 13 June 2014

Mr. President,

As States and civil society continue intensive efforts to plan strategically the future development of our planet and its peoples, we continue to be burdened, at this moment of history, with a long-term financial crisis. It has deeply affected not only those high-income economies where it was initiated, but also those struggling economies that depend so much on global opportunities in order to emerge from centuries-long oppression by abject poverty or by the remnants of colonialism, or by more recent unjust trade policies.

Moreover, in view of the escalating conflicts between and within various States, the human family often appears incapable of safeguarding peace and harmony in our troubled world. Nor can we ignore the destructive effects wrought by climate change both on the natural patrimony of this earth and on all women and men who have been made the stewards of creation.

Among the diverse causes of human suffering we must also consider the role of personal greed, which leads to the literal “enslavement” of millions of women, children, and men in clear situations of abuse and total disregard for the human person. Similarly, we must also consider the situation of people in low-paid employment who work under extremely negative conditions from which they see no way of escape. In the face of these seemingly insurmountable challenges, we must recognize the constant refrain: the poor and marginalized citizens of our world suffer the most negative effects and find it increasingly more difficult to extract themselves from their daily suffering.

Such tragic and unjust situations led Pope Francis to exclaim recently: “... inequality is the root of social evil”¹ and to insist that “money must serve, not rule.”² Indeed, the inequalities in our present-day society cause the gap between the rich and the poor to fester and to produce deep fissures in relations among people on local, national, regional, and global levels.

¹ Tweet by Pope Francis @ pontifex, 28 April 2014.

² Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), par. 58.

Mr. President,

Relying on the well-articulated Social Teaching of the Catholic Church, my Delegation proposes the principle and practice of solidarity as the only effective means to exit from the vicious cycle of poverty, of profiting at the expense of others, and of conflicts in this world. Solidarity is not a mere feeling of vague compassion, but rather, as Pope Paul II stated, “it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; this is to say, to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all.”³ The Independent Expert on the Human Rights and to International Solidarity, in turn, focuses on the implementation of this principle in relations between States by observing that it “...is a vital component of the duty of States to provide and seek international cooperation and assistance in the implementation of their human rights obligations.”⁴

Recent history has already confirmed the fact that global interdependence in our time is evident in such areas as public health, economy and the environment. However, such interdependence must be animated and driven by a spirit of solidarity. Understood and applied in this manner, solidarity can prevent, or at least, mitigate the impact of the global challenges, which are only too well known by all sectors of today’s society. Mere international cooperation, for example, can be perceived as a form of political “palliative care”, never tackling the root causes of the imbalances between developed and developing countries, nor removing the structural obstacles that generate poverty worldwide. On the other hand, full implementation of the principle of solidarity can shift the focus from cooperation based on a logic of profit extracted from one country by another to one based on mutual help in a spirit of brotherhood exercised without any conditionality.

On the micro level, the recognition of the principle of solidarity can help to elicit the support of individuals and communities in first resisting, and then resolving, such seemingly such intractable problems as human trafficking. Thus, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime launched a public awareness campaign asking people to self-reflect on this social scourge and to avoid any economic involvement in businesses that are based on such illegal activities. The Independent Expert makes reference to “preventive solidarity”⁵ as an appropriate and needed response to climate-related disasters. How many of us respond immediately, with donations of money or material goods, when such disasters strike and we see the evidence of massive destruction of homes, community infrastructure and human life? But, would it not be much better if we demonstrated solidarity by joining skill, expertise, experience, and resources to

³ Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987), par. 38.

⁴ Report of the IE, A/HRC/26/34, available at <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session36/Pages/ListReports.aspx>

⁵ Report of the IE, A/HRC/26/34, available at <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session26/ListReports.aspx>

strengthen efforts at disaster preparedness and building of sturdy structures to withstand the forces of nature? In a similar way, how many more tragedies of migrants, and of would-be migrants, do we need to experience before we finally prompt a new comprehensive approach that favours prevention rather than a so-called “cure”?

Indeed, in the global arena, “[o]ne also senses the urgent need to find innovative ways of implementing the principle of the responsibility to protect and of giving poorer nations an effective voice in shared decision-making. This seems necessary in order to arrive at political, juridical and economic order which can increase and give direction to international cooperation for the development of all peoples in solidarity”⁶

Mr. President,

Solidarity comes from an absolutely binding ethic; it is not simply an option, but rather a duty. It becomes, therefore, urgent to continue the effort and arrive at a full recognition and legal application of the principle of solidarity. In order to fully implement this principle, all members of the human family are called “to change the ... attitudes which define each individual’s relationship with self, with neighbor, with even the remotest human communities, and with nature itself; and all of this in view of higher values such as the common good or, ... the full development of the whole individual and of all people.”⁷

⁶ Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* (2009), par. 67

⁷ *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987), par. 38.