



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 Right to Development anniversary: “Sustainable Development with Dignity and Justice for All - Realizing the Right to Development for Present and Future Generations”  
*Geneva, 2 December 2014*

Mr. High Commissioner,  
Excellencies and Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am grateful to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights for organizing this initiative to commemorate the anniversary of the UN Declaration on the Right to Development. I am also honored to have this occasion to present a brief reflection on the implementation process of this right. At stake are the pursuit of a more equitable world and of a peaceful coexistence for an increasingly pluralistic world. This occasion affords us the opportunity to consider the Declaration on the Right to Development, the principles on which it stands, and to take stocks on the progress the international community has made in this very important area of concern.

30 years ago, a formal declaration on the Right to Development was prompted by social and political circumstances demanding a coordinated response to existing inequalities. Today, the global human family is still confronted with serious crises and challenges. U.N. data tell us that over 2.2 billion people – more than 15 per cent of the world’s population – are estimated to be either near or living in ‘multidimensional’ poverty with overlapping deprivations in health, education and living standards.<sup>1</sup> The economic and social gap between the “haves” and “have-nots” is widening. State and non-State actors are engaged in numerous serious and violent conflicts. They cause hundreds of thousands of victims. Pope Francis caught the public imagination when he defined the current situation a “World War Three...in pieces”<sup>2</sup>. These injustices and wars inhibit effective progress toward the implementation of the right to development. One might go so far as to deduce that, in some cases, a combination of national interests, arms trade, greed and power ambition block the political will many States from seriously pursuing the path of justice and peace as prescribed by the founding

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<sup>1</sup> UN Special Rapporteur on the Eradication of Extreme Poverty, 17 Oct. 2014.

<http://www.ohchr.org/SP/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=15175&LangID=E>

<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, Homily in Redipuglia, Italy. 13 September 2014.

documents of the U.N. These elements provide evidence that the ideals of equality and solidarity that inspired the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the treaties derived from this Declaration have lost their credibility for some people and that the culture supporting them has changed. Perhaps this reflection on how to universalize the implementation of the Declaration on the Right to Development can help to look at the fundamental principles that underlie this very right.

The social doctrine of the Catholic Church presents a few very fundamental notions, many explicitly articulated in the U.N. Declaration itself, as necessary for the proper approach and for the promotion of the *right to development*. These basic concepts are: 1) the unity of origin and a shared destiny of the human family; 2) the equal dignity of every person and of every community; 3) the universal destination of the goods of the earth; 4) human development must be integral embracing the whole person; 5) the human person must be at the center of every social activity; 6) solidarity and subsidiarity are necessary for a healthy development.<sup>3</sup> These principles are mutually intertwined, interdependent and essential for a right to development that can lead society out of its deep crises. Of these, I would like to highlight two in particular: equality of persons based on human dignity and the centrality of the human person and solidarity.

We can see a very strong, and necessary, I might add, convergence of the social doctrine of the Church and the Declaration on the Right to Development in the importance given to the dignity of the human person. For any realistic development of society, the most basic and simple starting point is the realization that every human person is created free and with an equal and inviolable dignity. Yet, it is precisely this basic point that is most often obfuscated or, in some cases, completely ignored, and this lends to all sorts of injustices and abuses of human rights. As Pope Francis remarked to the European Parliament “Promoting the dignity of the person means recognizing that he or she possesses inalienable rights which no one may take away arbitrarily, much less for the sake of economic interests.”<sup>4</sup> When the equal dignity of the human person is not respected, whether collectively as in the case of States and institutions, or individually, other more “pragmatic” or “utilitarian” categories become the criteria by which society operates. In such a fundamental shift of mentality, emerge categories of “values” that place the human person at the service of some other “material gain or value”. The person becomes functional to consumerism or political power. In these cases, the dignity of others is considered worth being “sacrificed” for some greater material good.

In this perspective, perhaps all too prevalent in many cultures, a major factor becomes evident: the *de facto* categorization of persons into “classes” or “groups” as means more or less useful to economic or political “progress”. This dangerous approach

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<sup>3</sup> Cfr., Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church, 446.

<sup>4</sup> Pope Francis, Speech to European Parliament, 25 Nov. 2014.

is very much in need of our reflection and discussion; its negative effects, including the fact that it does not embrace the “notion of development in its “entirety”, are to be acknowledged. Pope Francis in his social Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, observes: “Inequality is the root of social ills. The dignity of each human person and the pursuit of the common good are concerns which ought to shape all economic policies. At times, however, they seem to be a mere addendum imported from without in order to fill out a political discourse lacking in perspectives or plans for true and integral development.”<sup>5</sup> The task then before the international community and all individual stakeholders is striving to reclaim the centrality of the human person and the common good as essential for integral human development. In this way, the seemingly insurmountable and lopsided perspective that gives preference to merely economic and political gains can be overcome. But two conditions are required. The first, the ideology of extreme individualism that has become pervasive should be reconsidered as it contradicts or ignores the rights of others; the second, a renewed effort to place again the human person as the end to which all political and economic decisions must be aimed.

A natural consequence of the respect for the centrality of the human person and the pursuit of the common good of the human family is an effective exercise of solidarity. Solidarity is more than a mere sentiment of compassion for the victims of injustice and for the underprivileged. Rather, in its proper sense and implementation, solidarity is an obligation of all persons and of all nations to co-operate with one another in our globalized world and to work collectively towards “eliminating obstacles to development.”<sup>6</sup> Perhaps the term “solidarity” in its often-misused colloquial sense has been misunderstood. More than a mere expression of “random acts of kindness”, solidarity “presupposes the creation of a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and gives priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few.”<sup>7</sup> As such, solidarity leads beyond the radical individualism and materialism, found in so many cultural contexts, and toward the consideration of the plight of others, toward a change of worldview, in particular, with regard to the distribution of goods and resources which should not be at the service of a few privileged, but of all.

“Solidarity is a spontaneous reaction by those who recognize that the social function of property and the universal destination of goods are realities which come before private property. The private ownership of goods is justified by the need to protect and increase them, so that they can better serve the common good; for this reason, solidarity must be lived as the decision to restore to the poor what belongs to them. These convictions and habits of solidarity, when they are put into practice, open the way to other structural transformations and make them possible. Changing

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<sup>5</sup> Pope Francis, Apostolic Letter, *Evangelium gaudium*, 202-203.

<sup>6</sup> UN Declaration on the Right to Development, art. 3.3.

<sup>7</sup> *Evangelium gaudium*, 188.

structures without generating new convictions and attitudes will only ensure that those same structures will become, sooner or later, corrupt, oppressive and ineffectual.”<sup>8</sup>

The transformative vision necessary to make the right to development effective comes from the values that sustain it. In this effort to address root cause, systemic issues and structural changes there is a convergence between the Declaration on the right to development and the social doctrine of the Church. In particular, the Declaration affirms the right to development as a human right (art.1); the human person as the central subject of development (art.2,1); all human beings have a responsibility for development (ar.2,2); States have the duty to co-operate with each other in ensuring development (art.3). The equal dignity of every person, the centrality of the person, and solidarity, are essential components that we must preserve and implement in all of the economic and political decisions on the international and local levels. Indeed, these two principles undergird the right to development and certainly apply to every sector of life. If I may, I would like briefly to underscore two areas in particular in which there is urgent need of such attention: trade and migration.

The crisis witnessed in the Doha development agenda in the WTO negotiations admits to the necessity of finding ways of collaboration, placing the centrality of the human person in the prime place, rather than subservient to markets and economic advantage. The multilateral trade negotiations should return to their central role in addressing new problems, capitalizing on new opportunities, and, most importantly, in promoting a freer and more equitable trade, not as an end to itself, but as one of many tools to end poverty for all. The agreement just reached in the WTO moves in the positive direction and hopefully will accelerate the conclusion of the Doha Development Agenda.

The Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) has documented how a justly managed migration can become a resource for the benefit and development of countries of origin, arrival and for the migrants themselves. This goal is achieved when a global governance that prioritizes the person of the migrants and their human rights and is open to a fair acceptance of newcomers as partners in development shows their contribution without prejudice and realistically acknowledges their positive presence. The multilateral fora, even if imperfect, are the only place where all States have an equal voice that can ease the search for the common good of all.

In conclusion, my hope is that the emphasis placed on the Declaration on the Right to Development will serve as a catalyst to the proper implementation of its clear principles for the progress of the common good and the improvement of all sectors of life for people. Multilateral action can become effective and overcome current tragedies

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<sup>8</sup> *Evangelium gaudium*, 189.

and protracted situations of misery. I wish to close with the words, once again, of Pope Francis: “In the case of global political and economic organization, much more needs to be achieved, since an important part of humanity does not share in the benefits of progress and is in fact relegated to the status of second-class citizens. Future Sustainable Development Goals must therefore be formulated and carried out with generosity and courage, so that they can have a real impact on the structural causes of poverty and hunger, attain more substantial results in protecting the environment, ensure dignified and productive labor for all, and provide appropriate protection for the family, which is an essential element in sustainable human and social development. Specifically, this involves challenging all forms of injustice and resisting the “economy of exclusion”, the “throwaway culture” and the “culture of death” which nowadays sadly risk becoming passively accepted.”<sup>9</sup>.” (*Pope Francis, Address to the Secretary General of the United Nations and other Directors of various International Organizations, 5 May 2014.*)

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