



Presentation by His Excellency Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva
at the 2015 Humanitarian Segment of the Economic and Social Council
Geneva, 19 June 2015

Mr. President,

The current climate of violence, up rootedness and myopic politics makes the theme of this Humanitarian Segment timely and necessary. “The future of humanitarian affairs: towards greater inclusiveness, coordination, interoperability and effectiveness,” requires our commitment to integral human development and to cooperative solidarity. Natural and man-made disasters have produced millions of victims. To understand their plight, we need to adopt their perspective, an approach that highlights the consequences, leads to identifying the causes of disasters and to acting accordingly.

The priority of any humanitarian response are the needs of the victims. The capacities of the various responders, whether Governments, local or national civil society actors, or partners in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, should be leveraged towards that goal. To make the necessary cooperation work, the particular context with its specific needs, causes of emergencies, and available capacities to respond, should be taken into account.

While the more than \$11 billion provided for 2014 through interagency appeals was an all-time high, so too was the \$7.4 billion shortfall, highlighting the need to make the best use of available resources. Megatrends, such as climate change and environmental degradation, food and water scarcity and urbanization, are leading to greater vulnerability and exposure to hazards. Furthermore, crises are becoming more protracted, with 78 per cent of humanitarian spending by the members of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development going to protracted emergencies. Humanitarian appeals last for an average of seven years, and six countries have had appeals for 10 consecutive years.

Climate change and natural disasters negatively affect the enjoyment of several human rights¹. Under certain systems, such as the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights, any human rights violation could, in theory, give rise to a non-refoulement obligation. Coherent with such a juridical tradition, the principle of non-refoulement could be applied by analogy to new categories of people whose life and human rights are

¹ United Nations, Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the relationship between climate change and human rights, UN Doc. A/HRC/10/61, New York, 2009, paras. 16-41.

threatened by the negative consequences of climate change and of a general situation of violence. Protection should focus primarily on avoiding the risk of present and future violations. Where this need is acknowledged, a clear protection status should also be granted. Existing human rights law, and the non-refoulement principle, do not provide a right to stay or specify the precise content of the protection. Nevertheless, it should include non-rejection at the border and provide a basis for some form of complementary, possibly temporary, but effective protection.

The reduction of disaster risks is an important part of the effort which aims at the eradication of poverty. There is growing evidence that the poorest people in the more vulnerable countries bear most of the burden of adapting to climate consequences they had almost no role in creating. The Report of the Secretary General illustrates the many devastating effects of natural and man-made disasters that people are confronting all over the world, year after year. Men and women working for international, national and local humanitarian organizations, many of which are faith-based, risk their lives and future to aid the victims of such catastrophes. It is for the safety of these humanitarian workers, and for the welfare of the suffering people they assist, that we must work for a truly effective, coordinated, and humane disaster response system. Prevention starts with the recognition that "creation" is not a possession: man is a steward and thus he should care for and respect nature. These catastrophes are a global phenomenon that exceeds the competence of any one community or country. An adequate response requires a mobilization comparable in size to the damage inflicted. At the same time, we must recognize that a moral requirement of solidarity arises since we are united together as one human family.

Over the last years, the high rate of natural disasters was tragically matched by many, and extremely costly, man-made ones. Armed conflicts have devastated societies in many places, taken lives, ruined economies, set back development and frustrated efforts to restore peace. The world has witnessed an indescribable suffering: women sold as chattel, Christians and other believers murdered simply because of their convictions, children killed or used as human shields, and millions of people forcibly uprooted. The international community appears to lack the political will to address these crises and there is a real risk of forgetting all of these victims.

In this context, providing tangible assistance is met with extraordinary difficulties because violence is ongoing and the territories that are controlled by extremist factions disregard the local population. As such, millions of people remain without adequate access to assistance. However, access to people in need is a prerequisite for needs assessment and effective humanitarian action. Some Governments have devised cumbersome administrative procedures to restrict the movement of humanitarian convoys and the delivery of essential items. Parties in conflict have the primary responsibility for the protection and well-being of civilians under their control².

² http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/2015/64

Humanitarian personnel must be granted full and unimpeded access to people in need and they must be safeguarded and protected when doing so. In fact, all parties involved must comply fully with the rules and principles of international law and international humanitarian law. Likewise, the involved parties are obliged to guarantee civilians and victims of armed conflict safe and unhampered access to humanitarian aid.

Mr. President,

The Holy See Delegation would like to reaffirm that the only way to a fair solution is through dialogue, the silencing of arms and a commitment to negotiate. Such a solution should give priority to the good of the countries involved and their people as well as to those who have taken refuge elsewhere, who maintain the right to return as soon as possible to their country.

Despite some progress to improve the coordination and effectiveness of the humanitarian response, important gaps remain. In particular, when the media attention is taken away from an emergency, often the local faith communities are left with the task of continuing the necessary assistance. For this reason, the establishment of a High-level Panel on Humanitarian Financing may be useful in finding new ways for the humanitarian community to work with development actors and others. In this way, communities become more resilient to crises and less reliant on humanitarian aid. The international community should continue the process to enhance its operational effectiveness, building on the elements of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Transformative Agenda.

Mr. President,

In conclusion, the prevention of disasters is another chapter in the protection of creation; it calls for the cooperative action of all players to reinforce their common responsibility for the good of all. The sense of solidarity developed by the international community has to be preserved and applied and made more relevant and responsive to new situations. To solve disputes, the way forward is dialogue to prevent the scourge of war and the tragic consequences for the people affected. The current irrational explosion of violence shows the need for the urgent implementation of the objectives of this Humanitarian Segment. Indeed, International humanitarian law, as it promotes the common good, always prohibits the indiscriminate and unrestrained use of violence on any person, civilian or combatant. It should become, instead, the basis for a collaborative action inspired by solidarity toward the direct and indirect victims of disasters, whether natural or man-made.

Thank you, Mr. President.