



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 Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects
Geneva, 12 November 2015

Mr. President,

My Delegation congratulates you on your election and wishes you every success in leading our work.

In a deteriorated international context, armed conflicts and security tensions on all continents are the cause of thousands of deaths, millions of refugees, destruction, misery and unspeakable suffering. International structures, institutions, treaties and conventions, which are supposed to prevent or at least mitigate the consequences of these tragedies, seem paralyzed. The great, generous and ambitious ideas at the basis of our international system seem to have lost much of their attraction and their dynamism. International humanitarian law and the law of war are no longer accepted, at least in practice, as the indisputable norm of any armed conflict. Economic globalization that would have the unity of the human family as foundation, and cooperation as its objective, to promote solidarity and a peaceful and just world, is unfortunately feeding a "globalization of indifference." The most obvious expressions of such indifference are the collective selfishness and cynical realism which exclude the weakest and sacrifice human persons on the altar of short-term interests of power.

Mr. President,

In this context and in the framework of the CCW, an alarming development seems to be gaining ground. The respect and promotion of international humanitarian law are increasingly ignored and violated. Just look at what is happening in today's armed conflicts. At best, the humanitarian principles have become a mesmerizing litany. The Holy See is alarmed by these developments that can only lead to more violence, misery and suffering. The Holy See associates itself with the responsible and urgent warning launched recently by the United Nations Secretary-General and the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross. The description they make of the continued erosion of, and the non-compliance with, the rules of international humanitarian law is alarming. The two senior leaders judge the current situation as unacceptable. They see that the world is at a crossroads and that all state and non-state actors have the duty to engage to "renew a contract for humanity" that should benefit millions of people affected by armed conflicts.

The challenges of peace and respect of international humanitarian law are also the challenges of the CCW. If it wants to preserve some credibility, it should make a real contribution to development, respect and promotion of international humanitarian law. It has a mandate and the means to do so. But the political will and a more ambitious vision of priorities are also required. Surely, military means are not the preferred way to ensure peace and protect civilians; rather, it is the respect of an ethic of brotherhood and solidarity; the pursuit of an international policy based on justice, dialogue and cooperation; the guarantee of the dignity of the person and of the ensuing rights. Great principles cannot ensure fair and peaceful order if they are not effectively translated into practice. The practical implementation of international humanitarian law is the indispensable minimum against the inhumanity of war and armed conflict.

Mr. President,

The Holy See considers that the CCW can and must make a contribution in this direction. Three urgent issues are on the agenda of the CCW and its protocols. Now is the time to act, because the lives of thousands of people are at risk. It is also about the future of the next generations. It is also about the security and stability of all countries, increasingly interconnected. The Holy See proposes to put in place a Group of Governmental Experts on lethal autonomous weapon systems (LAWS), another one on the use of explosive weapons in populated areas and a third group for the revision of the protocol on incendiary weapons. These are not new issues for the CCW. What is happening on the ground in many conflicts is unacceptable. The CCW bears a part of the responsibility with regards to these negative developments and to providing solutions in areas of its competence.

In a renewed awareness of the seriousness of the situation of international humanitarian law, the CCW is called to fulfill its role, in partnership with the ICRC, international organizations and the civil society active in this area. Allow me, Mr. President, to conclude with this quote from the speech of Pope Francis to the General Assembly of the United Nations last September. He says:

“Without the recognition of certain incontestable natural ethical limits and without the immediate implementation of those pillars of integral human development, the ideal of “saving succeeding generations from the scourge of war” and “promoting social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom”, risks becoming an unattainable illusion, or, even worse, idle chatter which serves as a cover for all kinds of abuse and corruption... War is the negation of all rights and a dramatic assault on the environment. If we want true integral human development for all, we must work tirelessly to avoid war between nations and peoples. To this end, there is a need to ensure the uncontested rule of law and tireless recourse to negotiation, mediation and arbitration...”

I thank you Mr. President.