



Intervention of **Archbishop Ivan Jurkovič**,
Head of the Delegation of the Holy See to the United Nations International Conference
in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace:
Peace is possible – frameworks for a way forward
Geneva, 29 June 2016

Mr. Chair,

The Holy See commends the United Nations Committee for the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for organizing this conference to consider lessons learned from past Peace Conferences, build upon achievements, however modest they might have been, and identify new ideas in the emerging approaches, in order to provide an ever stronger international support to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

The Palestinian Question has been asked, and remains unsatisfactorily answered since the birth of the United Nations. Almost sixty-nine years after its adoption by the United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 181 remains only half-fulfilled. Decades of negotiations have failed to achieve the creation of a Palestinian State.

The lack of substantive negotiations taking place lately, the spiraling of acts of violence and serious doubts about the continued validity of the Oslo Accords not only demonstrate that the Question has not been solved, but, on the contrary, they seem to indicate that it is becoming increasingly intractable. In recent years, other very serious conflicts, in particular the Syrian tragedy, have added to the complexity of the problems in the region.

The Holy See has always favored the two-State solution. Pope Benedict XVI reaffirmed this principle during his 2009 visit of the Holy Land, when he said: “Let it be universally recognized that the State of Israel has the right to exist, and to enjoy peace and security within internationally agreed borders. Let it be likewise acknowledged that the Palestinian people have a right to a sovereign independent homeland, to live with dignity and to travel freely. Let the two-state solution become a reality, not remain a dream.”

Pope Francis reiterated the same principle in Bethlehem in 2014, when he affirmed: “The time has come for everyone to find the courage to be generous and creative in the service of the common good, the courage to forge a peace which rests on the acknowledgment by all of the right of two States to exist and to live in peace and security within internationally recognized borders.” The time is long overdue to put an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict which has become increasingly unacceptable.

The Holy See believes that the peace process between Israelis and Palestinians can move forward only if it is directly negotiated between the Parties, with the strong support of the

international community, as this international conference is meant to catalyze. Israel and Palestine are called to make courageous decisions, if both are to enjoy security, prosperity and peaceful co-existence side-by-side with internationally recognized borders. Israelis and Palestinians have suffered too long from the misguided view that their differences can be solved by force. Only sustained negotiations, entered into in good faith, will resolve the conflicts and bring peace to the peoples of Israel and Palestine. The Holy See strongly believes that both Israelis and Palestinians, in the depth of their hearts, profoundly long for peace.

The Holy See also believes that the whole peace process does not depend solely on formal negotiations no matter how indispensable these are. Peace cannot be achieved if healing and reconciliation, mutual recognition and respect at the personal and communitarian levels do not accompany political solutions. For this reason, my delegation is pleased that this Conference is going to consider the role of civil society and track II diplomacy in taking stock of the next steps in the peace process.

The Middle East should be a fertile ground for civil society and track II diplomacy, including faith-based “informal diplomacy”. As a cradle of great civilizations and the birthplace of the three main monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the Middle East is fit to foster the involvement of civil society and track II diplomacy in peacemaking and peacebuilding.

Religions and believers, in particular, must prove themselves worthy of their rightful place in the whole process of pacification in the region. They must put an end to mutual hatred that is lending credence to a “clash of civilizations.” My delegation believes that the more religion is manipulated to justify acts of terror and violence, the more religious leaders must be engaged in the overall effort to defeat the violence that attempts to hijack it. Spurious religious fervor must be countered by authentic religious instruction and by the example of authentic communities of faith. In this regard, the Holy See reiterates its appeal to all religious leaders to denounce and reject every spurious form and perversion of religion to foment violence, and to hold on to the conviction that peace is not only possible and desirable, but is our common call and duty.

There is a strong nexus between religion and diplomacy, between faith-based “informal diplomacy” and the formal diplomacy of States and multilateral bodies. Strengthening this nexus could make a strong positive contribution to the overall effort to achieve peace for all Israelis and Palestinians, and for all the inhabitants of the region.

Thank you, Mr. President.