



Intervention by H.E. Archbishop Ivan Jurkovič, Apostolic Nuncio and
Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations
and Other International Organizations in Geneva

"2nd Dialogue on Faith, Peacebuilding & Development"

9 February 2017

Mr. Moderator,

First of all, let me express a warm welcome to everyone and thank the conveners of this significant initiative. I would also like to reiterate the Holy See's appreciation for the leadership of the Kingdom of Jordan for its endeavor to promote in Geneva interreligious dialogue and peaceful coexistence between the faithful of different religions.

The first thought that came to my mind when I was invited to take part in this panel is the unity of its origin and the shared destiny of the human family. These are indeed the same principles that inspired King Abdullah II and Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad to put forward the proposal for a United Nations' Resolution on a "World Interfaith Harmony Week", stating that *"humanity everywhere is bound together, not only by mutual interests, but by shared commandments to love God and neighbor; to love the good and neighbor"* (Address of King Abdullah II to the United Nations General Assembly 2010).

The same resolution 65/L.5 on the *"World Interfaith Harmony Week"* rightly perceives that the moral imperatives of all religions, convictions, and beliefs, call for peace, tolerance, and mutual understanding. Indeed, interfaith dialogue, before being a discussion on the main themes of faith, is always a conversation about our human existence.

Today, it seems important to stress the dialogue at all levels: diplomatic, among religious traditions, and intercultural. Pope Francis, through many symbolic actions, has proven that *"meeting one another in fraternal friendship is a powerful sign, one that shows the harmony which religions can build together, based on personal relations and on the good will of those responsible."* (Address of Pope Francis at the interreligious meeting with the Sheikh and with the representatives of the different religious communities of Azerbaijan, September 2016).

Indeed, it is not mere tolerance of one another that should represent our common ground, because tolerance has a negative meaning. Relations among religious traditions should be based on the more dynamic concept of brotherhood, instead, because we will be accountable not only for the actions we make, but also for those that we omit to do. In this regard, interfaith harmony must not be limited to a mere peaceful coexistence: the true

meaning of peaceful coexistence is mutual enrichment. Peace must be seen in its positive and dynamic connotation: peace is not simply acknowledging the status quo, but rather a continuous and proactive improvement of our situation as human family

For these reasons, a peace based on fear and on deterrence cannot be considered a real peace. The failures to the peaceful resolution of conflicts and to achieve global disarmament are a testimony to the need for new efforts to foster harmony among believers. *"We cannot accept that nuclear weapons are simply an unavoidable means of maintaining a balance of power through a balance of terror. As pilgrims of peace we must challenge these ways of thinking. This is all the more urgent today because the possibility of setting in motion the terrible mechanism of general destruction is unfortunately very real."* (Address of Archbishop Gallagher to civil and religious authorities, Hiroshima, 30 January 2017)

On a more practical level, the relevance of a proactive inter-religious dialogue and its contribution to the pursuit of the common good can be appreciated while addressing other major concerns of our time. Let us think about human rights, migration, climate change, trade regulations, protection of the environment, and prevention of conflicts. In order to manage effectively these global issues, there can be no alternative but interfaith dialogue and a concerted effort.

When analyzing the situations of tension and conflict that have emerged during recent years in the international scenario, a dangerous temptation is to place them in the prospective of the clash of civilizations, thus making the latter an inevitable self-fulfilling prophecy. But this interpretation entails a negative take on religions. On the contrary, at the origin of all these dramatic situations there is a limited vision of the human person that paves the way to the spread of injustice and inequality, thus leading to conflict situations. Indeed, as it is in the mind and hearts of men that wars begin, it is from within our hearts and minds that the search for justice and peace must begin.

"Religions are called to build a culture of encounter and peace, based on patience, understanding, and humble, tangible steps. The fraternity and sharing that we seek to increase will not be appreciated by those who want to highlight divisions, reignite tensions and profit from opposition and differences; rather, fraternity and sharing are invoked and longed for by those who desire the common good." (Address of Pope Francis at the interreligious meeting with the Sheikh and with the representatives of the different religious communities of Azerbaijan, September 2016)

Dialogue among religious traditions can greatly contribute to shape the human conscience, a moral patrimony widely shared which expresses a universal ethical message. *"The form and the extension of these traditions can considerably differ according to cultures and situations, but nevertheless they remind us of the existence of a patrimony of moral values common to all human beings."* (Cardinal Tauran at the 3rd Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, Astana, 2009). For example, the "Golden Rule" which is the essential basis for the peaceful resolution of disputes ("do not do to others what you do not want

them to do to you” or “do unto others as you would have them do unto you”) is found, under one form or another, in all religions, just as the respect for the dignity of the human person.

Peacebuilding through active nonviolence is the natural and necessary complement to the Church’s continuing efforts to limit the use of force by resorting to moral norms. (Pope Francis, Message for the 2017 World Day of Peace: “Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace). In many parts of the world, beginning with the Middle East, such an approach is much needed now, not only to bring an end to the Syrian conflict, but also to foster fully reconciled societies and to renew peaceful civil coexistence.

Pope Francis has made interreligious dialogue one of his priorities. In his symbolic visit to the Central African Republic, Pope Francis approached Muslims, Catholic, and Protestants, asking them to place the love for one another above everything, proving that religion does not divide people but rather unites them. Peace is essential to the development of the world, to establish a culture of dialogue and encounter for a future that is truly inclusive for everyone, without any marginalization.

Religious and ethnic communities should never become an instrument of regional and international geopolitical games. In his letter to the Bishops of Nigeria, Pope Francis stated that “Massacring innocent people in the name of God is not religion but the manipulation of religion for ulterior motives. In fact, believers everywhere have experienced a common tragic outcome, at the hands of people who claim to be religious, but who instead abuse religion, to make of it an ideology for their own distorted interests of exploitation and murder.” (Pope Francis, Letter to the Bishops of Nigeria, 17 March 2015)

In his recent visits to Sweden, Pope Francis also mentioned the urgent need for healing past wounds and journeying together towards common goals, underlining the need for dialogue in the human family. Such dialogue is possible and necessary as shown by the historical meeting in Cuba with Patriarch Kirill of Moscow, as well as by his journeys to Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. (Cf. Pope Francis, Address of Pope Francis to the Diplomatic Corps 2017)

In another example of his concern for the promotion of peace, Pope Francis also encouraged Venezuela to pursue the path of sincere and constructive social dialogue in order to alleviate the suffering of the people, especially the poor. Similarly, in the delicate situation in Colombia, Pope Francis emphasized the importance of unity, reconciliation, and forgiveness. Indeed, peace, justice, and forgiveness are mutually complementary: there can be no peace without justice, but also no true justice without forgiveness.

I would like to conclude my intervention by stressing once again that we all belong to one human family and reiterate the significance and urgency of interreligious dialogue, as religions can build bridges and be creative mediators of peace.

Dialogue is essential if we are to know, understand and respect one another. *“But, as experience has shown, for such dialogue and encounter to be effective, it must be grounded in a full and forthright presentation of our respective convictions. Certainly, such dialogue will accentuate how varied our beliefs, traditions and practices are. But if we are honest in presenting our convictions, we will be able to see more clearly what we hold in common [..] For the sake of peace, religious beliefs must never be allowed to be abused in the cause of violence and war. We must be clear and unequivocal in challenging our communities to live fully the tenets of peace and coexistence found in each religion, and to denounce acts of violence when they are committed.”* (Address of Pope Francis to the Interreligious and Ecumenical Gathering, Sri Lanka, 2015)

Thank you.