



Statement by His Excellency Archbishop Ivan Jurkovič
Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations
and Other International Organizations in Geneva
at the 34th Session of the Human Rights Council
Item 3 – Report of the Special Rapporteur on on the Issue of Human Rights Obligations
Relating to the Enjoyment of a Safe, Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment

Geneva, 7 March 2017

Mr. Chairman,

The Delegation of the Holy See welcomes the report, which focused on a series of timely concerns for our “common home”. During the last two years, the international community has given evidence of a determined commitment to manage the critical issues of climate change and the degradation of the ecosystem. In shaping the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals, we have renewed the global engagement expressed in Rio de Janeiro, in 1992, which clearly stated that “in order to achieve sustainable development, environmental protection shall constitute an integral part of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation from it.”¹

All of these actions “provide new opportunities to address development challenges with a perspective that integrates environmental, economic and social dimensions.”² The interconnected relationship between biodiversity and the promotion of human rights appears more clearly perceived by all. “Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it.”³

The degradation and loss of biodiversity can reinforce existing patterns of discrimination and thus undermine the right to an adequate standard of living, which touches the rights to adequate food, to water and sanitation, and to health.

The Holy See notes that there is an asymmetric distribution of the cost and benefits of this situation, which is a direct result of an economic view that takes into account only the immediate profits and ignores the cost of the related damages resulting from such strategies. Indeed, while this policy approach may achieve some success in the short term,

¹ Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, Principle 4.

² Cancun Declaration on Mainstreaming the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity for Well-being. December 2-3, 2016, n. 5.

³ Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si*, n. 139.

it “too often [results in] overexploitation of natural resources, pollutes... rivers and aquifers, cuts down... forests, destroys... sacred places and displaces [people] from their homes.”⁴

In fact, even if all people are affected by the loss of biodiversity, some areas and communities depend on it more strongly than others do. A striking example can be found in the situation of indigenous peoples who rely on the products of their region and thus encounter terrible consequences as a result of environmental harm.

While fully acknowledging, the critical situation presented by the Special Rapporteur, the Holy See would like to take this opportunity to emphasize that “humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common house”.⁵ It is well known that the loss of biodiversity affects not only those immediately impacted; thus, this crisis cannot be relegated solely to a national problem. It must be recalled that “the entire international community is part of one interdependent human family. The decisions and behaviors of one of the members of this family have profound consequences for the others”⁶.

Indeed, there is no easy path or solution to take and there is a great need to find a solution which has “an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature”.⁷

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, we all should consider that the importance of these ecosystems is not limited only to the determination of the best way to use them, but more so to the fact that they have an intrinsic value apart from their usefulness. A lifestyle based on a “throwaway culture” is unsustainable and should have no place in our models of development. This is an educational and cultural challenge that requires the response and commitment of the entire human family to affirm and implement international agreements to ensure that they will be truly effective. The Holy See will continue to work together with all people of good will who are engaged in taking care of our common home. Thus, my Delegation pledges its support to actions that aim to promote a “culture of care” to preserve and benefit creation as well as our neighbors and the entire human family.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

⁴ Report of the Special Rapporteur on on the Issue of Human Rights Obligations Relating to the Enjoyment of a Safe, Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment, A/HRC/34/49 para. 49.

⁵ Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter, *Laudato Si*, n.13.

⁶ Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State of His Holiness, *Statement on the UN Summit on Climate*, New York, September 23, 2014.

⁷ Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter, *Laudato Si*, n.139.