



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 35th Session of the Human Rights Council
Item 3 - Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights

Geneva, 8 June 2017

Mr. President,

The Delegation of the Holy See thanks the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights for his Report and for highlighting the “rapidly growing sense of economic insecurity afflicting large segments of many societies. There is an increasing feeling of being exposed, vulnerable, overwhelmed and helpless, and of being systematically marginalized, both economically and socially.”¹ This situation increasingly affects every part of the world, and requires an intensified effort to deal with people reduced to living in conditions of extreme poverty.

Over the last decade, we have witnessed the preeminence of economic policies on human rights. While there has been a downward trend on global poverty, there has been a worsening of inequality. Looking at the current economic situation, 1% of the world population possesses 99% of the global wealth. “At the very top, this year’s data finds that collectively the richest eight individuals have a net wealth which is the same as the net wealth of the bottom half of humanity,”² that amounts to approximately 3.6 billion people. Furthermore, recent statistics report that fewer people live today in extreme poverty than ever before. From 1990 to 2013, we moved from 4 in 10 people living in conditions of extreme poverty, to approximately 1 in 10. Nevertheless, that still represents more than 767 million people.³ Moreover, such a significant number of people living in extreme poverty in the modern world should motivate urgent and effective efforts, at local, national and international levels, to eradicate this condition that is so unworthy of human dignity.

Such efforts require direct engagement with people, rather than a distant and abstract focus on eradication strategies alone. As stated by Pope Francis, there is a need “to ‘de-naturalize’ extreme poverty, to stop seeing it as a statistic rather than a reality. [...] The fact that today, well into the twenty-first century, so many people suffer from this scourge is due to a selfish and wrong distribution of resources.”⁴

Inequality is not only caused by economic mismanagement, but also by a social construct that often depends on political and social decisions. As stated in 2015, with the launch of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), there is a need to revitalize and enhance a global partnership “that brings together Governments, civil society, the private sector, the United Nations system and other actors and mobilizes all available resources.”⁵

¹ Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights.

² Oxfam, “An economy for the 99%”, briefing paper, January 2017. Oxfam calculations using wealth of the richest individuals from the Forbes Billionaires list and wealth of the bottom 50% from Credit Suisse Global Wealth Databook (2016).

³ World Bank Open Data, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/understanding-poverty>.

⁴ Pope Francis, Address to the Executive Board of the World Food Programme, 13~~th~~ June 2016.

⁵ Sustainable Development Goal, 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for

Such initiatives should aim to “empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all”⁶ in the construction of equitable progress.

In this regard, the Holy See has always stressed the fundamental value of solidarity, which “must be lived as the decision to restore to the poor what belongs to them.”⁷ Solidarity must be articulated at the national level as subsidiarity, while at the international level, it calls for a wider commitment to international cooperation. Through the 2030 Agenda, the international community has chosen solidarity over egoism: solidarity with the excluded of today, solidarity with the poor of tomorrow, solidarity with future generations, in line with the principles that provide a foundation for concrete responses to those in need. Following the solemn commitment to the SDGs in 2015, the global community requires the engagement of all stakeholders in facilitating international cooperation and in planning and implementing a comprehensive framework for the protection of human dignity and the promotion of integral human development. For people to avoid the indignity of extreme poverty, we must allow them to be agents of their own destiny. Hence, all persons must have access to the conditions and resources that allow them to develop to the full extent their God-given human dignity, rights-and responsibilities.

In conclusion Mr. President,

The fight against poverty calls us to deeper commitments and concrete acts of solidarity, aiming to design and implement projects truly focused on the common good, which emphasizes the cooperation and participation of all local, national, regional, and global stakeholders. Reflecting on the situation of today’s world, Pope Francis decries the absolute autonomy of markets and financial speculation and urges the attack of the structural causes of inequality, which he defines as “the root of social ills.”⁸ The achievement of the eradication of extreme poverty requires “more than economic growth. [...] It requires decisions, programmes, mechanisms and processes specifically geared to a better distribution of income, the creation of sources of employment and an integral promotion of the poor which goes beyond a simple welfare mentality.”⁹

Thank you, Mr. President.

sustainable development.

⁶ Sustainable Development Goal, 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries.

⁷ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, № 189.

⁸ Ibidem, №-202.

⁹ Ibidem, №. 204.