



Statement by His Excellency Archbishop Ivan Jurkovič  
Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the UN and Other International Organizations in Geneva  
at the 37th Session of the Human Rights Council  
Annual Full Day Meeting: Rights of the Child  
5 March 2018

Mr President,

My Delegation takes note of the High Commissioner's Report on protecting the rights of the child in humanitarian situations and commends its special focus on child protection and the implementation of the rights to health and education in emergency situations. While some progress has been made, we are deeply concerned by the fact that, in 2017, around 535 million children<sup>1</sup> were affected by humanitarian disasters; this represents one child out of four in the world.

We are experiencing a growing number of humanitarian situations in all regions of the world, which affect too many people, especially our children, our future. Armed conflicts, local crises and natural disasters due to climate change are creating waves of refugees, migrants, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and suffering people every day. Many innocent children are trapped in vulnerable situations just because they are living in the poorest parts of the world, they belong to ethnic or religious minorities, are refugees or migrants, sometimes unaccompanied or suffering disabilities. Most of all, they risk to be victims of unscrupulous individuals or organisations, suffering abuses, smuggling, trafficking for sexual or labour slavery, or removal of organs, or even recruitment as soldiers.

My Delegation would like to highlight that this year's seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – which sets the protection, promotion and respect of the dignity of human person as the pivotal concern of the international community – should remind us that the dignity of our children is at risk and that the best interests of the child should be a priority within every humanitarian situation. Such situations have an enormous impact on children's formative years, affecting their survival, their mental, social and environmental development as well as their physical well-being.

Mr President,

Let me point out that the human rights to education and to health shape the future of every child. However, children cannot benefit from these and other human rights unless they are registered at birth. If a proper path of education and development is not resumed, these

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<sup>1</sup> UNICEF, "Humanitarian Action for Children 2017".

children are at risk of becoming a lost generation. Prevention is the best medicine, and this begins with access to citizenship, health, education and promoting a culture of respect of human rights and human dignity of every child. In fact, as underlined by the UN Secretary-General, the legal framework to protect children is in place, it just needs to be applied. However, “if we leave the next generation traumatised, seething with grievances, we betray those we serve and we betray ourselves”<sup>2</sup>.

Mr President,

My delegation calls on the international community, governments, civil society, NGOs and all relevant stakeholders to collaborate closely to protect children. The common good and the best interest of the child should be the guiding principles in all circumstances and without any conditions, based on solidarity and on the awareness that the future is in the hands of our children.

Children require heightened attention, by all members of the human family who must share the responsibility to protect and help them to enjoy their God-given human dignity. In fact, as remembered by Pope Francis, “a people that does not take care of its elderly, its children and its youth have no future, because it abuses both memory and promise”<sup>3</sup>.

Let us reject the throw-away culture that plagues our world and feeds tendencies toward greed, corruption, violence, war and environmental degradation. Let us insist that all citizens of this world have a responsibility to care for the safety and the physical and emotional health of children, who constitute the future of our society.

Thank you, Mr. President.

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<sup>2</sup> Guterres, A. “Remarks to the Security Council Open Debate on Children and Armed Conflict”, 31 October 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, “Message of Holy Father Francis to participants in the 47<sup>th</sup> Social Week of Italian Catholics”, Turin, 12-15 September 2013