



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 42nd Session of the Human Rights Council
Item 3 – Report of the Independent Expert on the Enjoyment of all human rights by older persons

Geneva, 11 September 2019

Mr. President,

The Delegation of the Holy See wishes to thank the Independent Expert for her report¹, which focuses on the enjoyment of human rights by older persons, particularly those facing emergency situations.

Whether caused either by conflict or natural disasters, emergency situations tend to obstruct the full enjoyment of human rights. However, in those instances, the most susceptible persons are often the elderly. They may bear a heavier burden than others, since they are at a greater risk of being robbed, marginalized or neglected, often suffering misery, illness or disability, and in some cases a lack of social welfare. Thus, they require a specific attention, so that “no one is left behind”.

The report accurately identifies various critical areas of human rights that can be affected by such situations, namely the rights to housing, social security, work, proper nutrition and healthcare, protection from violence, maltreatment and abuse and reliable communication, among others.

Responses to emergencies should be adapted in order to address the diverse, daily-life situations of all people. In this sense, the constant call of the Holy See to put the human person and his/her needs and personal and social dynamics at the centre of legislation and of action by governmental and intergovernmental agencies is key to the development of strategies that fully respect the needs and rights of all, even while responding to complex emergencies.

The wisdom, humanity and intelligence of first responders and humanitarian actors, to whom it is fit to pay tribute here, must find proper legal basis in their mandate for a swift and sensitive action, each and every time an emergency situation occurs.

¹ A/HRC/42/43

Mr President,

The report indicates how the loss and breakdown in social protection networks² brings about dire consequences for the physical and mental health of older persons. Therefore, it is important for societies to consider how family relationships, in which the older person often is at the centre and an important point of reference, must always be taken into account. As Pope Francis noted, a “civilization will move forward if it knows how to respect wisdom, the wisdom of the elderly. In a civilization in which there is no room for the elderly or where they are thrown away because they create problems, this society carries with it the virus of death.”³

As a general rule, both in normal and emergency situations, the family is the best safety net for older persons, who can find protection, care and an environment in which they may continue to be active and contribute to society. Thus, when responses to emergency situations are being planned, the important part played by the family should be respected for its essential nature and its dynamic role. In this regard, any initiatives, protocols or plans of action promoted by international agencies or non-governmental organizations, should respect and include the role of the family in their relief services, as well as protect persons in every phase of life.

Mr President,

In times of violence, or when a disaster strikes, entire communities run the risk of losing their cultural identity, their traditions and the native languages that bind people together.

In this regard, older persons, rather than being a burden, represent a pivotal element for the reconstruction of those communities that have undergone such dire situations, and they should be recognized as vital actors for swift and effective recovery in those communities. Their voices should also be heard, their potential and expertise could help rebuild social links and local structures.

Thank you, Mr. President.

² Cfr. Ibid. N.66

³ Pope Francis, Wednesday General Audience, 4 March 2015.