



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 43rd Session of the Human Rights Council, Agenda Item 3
Promotion and Protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social,
and cultural rights, including the right to development
Rights of persons with disabilities

28 February 2020

Madame President,

My Delegation has given careful consideration to the detailed and comprehensive Report of Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities. We note with much concern the finding that, despite significant advances in the recognition of the rights of these persons, “the deeply rooted negative perceptions about the value of their lives continue to be a prevalent obstacle in all societies.” Pope Francis expressed his strong rejection of such cultural concepts as a “narcissistic and utilitarian” vision that “unfortunately leads many to consider as marginal people with disabilities, without recognizing in them the multiform human and spiritual wealth.”¹ Similar to the findings of the Special Rapporteur regarding a good quality of life by persons with disabilities, Pope Francis has called attention to the fact that “many people who, with their fragility, even in serious cases, have found the path of a good life rich in meaning, if with some hardship.”²

The Special Rapporteur calls attention to a “close but conflictual” relationship between the perspectives of bioethics and the promotion of rights of persons with disabilities. On the other hand, my Delegation understands that both fields of activity should find a consistent foundation in the recognition of, and respect for, the inherent dignity of the human person. Pope Francis constantly encourages: “... respect for the integrity of the human being and health care from conception to natural death, considering the person in his/her singularity, always as an end and not as a means. Such a principle is fundamental also with regard to bio-technological applications in

¹ Pope Francis, Audience with participants in Conference on “*Catechesis and Persons with Disabilities: A Necessary Engagement in the Daily Pastoral Life of the Church*”, Vatican City, 21 October 2017.

² *Ibid.*

the medical field, which never can be used in a way that is harmful to human dignity, nor should be guided solely by industrial or commercial motives.”³

Madame President, my Delegation notes with deep concern the point made by the Special Rapporteur that contemporary practices of genetic prenatal screening and diagnosis “may reinforce and socially validate the message that persons with disabilities should never have been born” and thus lead to forced abortion measures being carried out on unborn children affected by potentially disabling conditions. In this regard, the Holy See wishes to state unequivocally that it “understands access to reproductive health as being a holistic concept that does not consider abortion or access to abortion as a dimension of those terms”.⁴ In a similar manner, the Special Rapporteur noted the increased vulnerability of disabled persons to implementation of both so-called “euthanasia” and “assisted suicide” legislation. The recently-issued Position Paper of the Abrahamic Monotheistic Religions on Matters Concerning the End of Life, signed in Vatican City on 28 October 2019, insists: “Euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide are inherently and consequentially morally and religiously wrong and should be forbidden with no exceptions. Any pressure upon dying patients to end their lives by active and deliberate actions is categorically rejected.”⁵

In conclusion, Madame President, my Delegation expresses its firm conviction that “... there is no human life that is more sacred than another, as there is no human life that is qualitatively more significant than another.”⁶ The Holy See has consistently called for individuals with disabilities to be completely and compassionately integrated into society, as they possess full and inalienable human rights.⁷ Their own courage and richness also deserve to be acknowledged, as well as their contribution to society and humanity. With regard to the role of this Council and its Member States, as we review the Conclusions and Recommendations in the Special Rapporteur’s Report, let us also heed the appeal by Pope Francis in his message for World

³ Pope Francis, Audience with Italian National Committee for Bioethics, Vatican City, 28 January 2016, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/speeches/2016/january/documents/papa-francesco_20160128_comitato-nazionale-bioetica.html

⁴ Statement by H.E. Archbishop Celestino Migliore, Apostolic Nuncio, Permanent Observer of the Holy See, 61st session of the UN General Assembly, Before the 76th plenary meeting, on item 67 (b): Human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms: note by the Secretary-General transmitting the final report of the Ad Hoc Committee on a Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities (A/61/611): draft resolution (para. 7)

⁵ Position Paper of the Abrahamic Monotheistic Religions on Matters Concerning the End of Life, signed in Vatican City, 29 October 2019, https://zenit.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Dichiarazione-Congiunta_ENG.pdf

⁶ Pope Francis, Address to the Participants in the Meeting Organized by the International Federation of Catholic Medical Associations, Clementine Hall, 20 September 2013, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco_20130920_associazioni-medici-cattolici.html

⁷ Statement by H.E. Archbishop Celestino Migliore, Apostolic Nuncio, Permanent Observer of the Holy See, 61st session of the UN General Assembly, Before the 76th plenary meeting., op. cit.

Disabilities Day 2019: “Indeed, making good laws and breaking down physical barriers is important, but it is not enough, if the mentality does not change as well, if we do not overcome a widespread culture that continues to produce inequalities, preventing people with disabilities from actively participating in ordinary life.”⁸

Thank you, Madame President.

⁸ Message of Pope Francis on World Disabilities Day, 03 December 2019, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2019/documents/papa-francesco_20191203_messaggio-disabilita.html