



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
Item 3 – Report of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief

Geneva, 2 March 2020

Madam President,

The Delegation of Holy See notes with great concern the Report presented, at the very last moment, by the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, A/HRC/43/48, for consideration of the Human Rights Council. Particularly unacceptable and offensive are the numerous references that recommend that freedom of religion or belief and conscientious objection must be surrendered for the promotion of other so-called “human rights”, which certainly do not enjoy consensus, thus being a sort of “ideological colonization” on the part of some States and international institutions. As such, the Report, at least in part, is actually an attack on freedom of religion or belief as well as freedom of conscience.

It bears repeating that the Holy See has always understood “gender” and related terms according to the ordinary, generally accepted usage of the word “gender”, based on the biological identity that is male and female. In this regard, the Holy See recalls its Final Statement, offered at the conclusion of the Beijing Conference on Women, on 15 September 1995: “The term “gender” is understood by the Holy See as grounded in biological sexual identity, male or female [...]” (Cf. Holy See’s Final Statement at the 4th World Conference on Women, Beijing, 1995).

My Delegation cannot but lament that the Report seems to focus less on the protection of men and women, of any faith or personal belief, that are persecuted or discriminated against (a still too vivid reality for millions of persons worldwide), and more on pushing a vision of human society that is not shared by all and does not reflect the social, cultural and religious reality of many peoples.

Ironically, in the year of the landmark Declaration on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together issued, on the 4th of February 2019 by the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar and Pope Francis, which called on world leaders to work towards spreading a culture of tolerance and living together in peace, the Special Rapporteur makes no reference to the efforts made by religious leaders to intervene at the earliest opportunity to stop the shedding of innocent blood and bring an end to wars.

The Holy See notes “[t]he growing influence within the international Organizations of powers and interest groups that impose their own visions and ideas, sparking new forms of

ideological colonization, often in disregard for the identity, dignity and sensitivities of peoples”¹.

It is rather unfortunate, yet increasingly less surprising given its frequency, that a UN Report, which should defend the fundamental and universal human right of freedom of religion or belief as well as the right to conscientious objection, is now attacking the very reality it is called to defend.

Thank you, Madam President.

¹ Pope Francis, Address to the Diplomatic Corp accredited to the Holy See , 7 January 2019.