



Statement of the Permanent Mission of the Holy See  
to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva  
at the 47<sup>th</sup> Session of the Human Rights Council  
Item 3 – Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and  
consequences

*Geneva, 28 June 2021*

Madam President,

The Delegation of Holy See takes note of the report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, which constitutes a grave violation of human rights that continues to afflict the lives of women and girls in many places throughout the world.

The numbers speak for themselves. For example, each day 137 women are killed by members of their own family; adult women make up nearly half of the victims of human trafficking identified worldwide; globally, 1 in 3 women have experienced physical or sexual violence at some point; and 15 million adolescent girls worldwide aged 15 to 19 have experienced forced sexual relations.<sup>1</sup> To make matters worse, last year there was the aggravating factor of the pandemic, which has rendered many women more vulnerable to violence in private environments as a result of the restriction of movement, social isolation and economic insecurity.

Madam President,

This year's report specifically focuses on rape as a grave, systematic and widespread human rights violation.<sup>2</sup> As stated by Pope Francis, the crime of rape is "a most grave offence against the dignity of women, who are not only violated in body but also in spirit, resulting in a trauma hard to erase and with effects on society as well".<sup>3</sup> On a broader scale, psychological violence, verbal violence, physical violence and sexual violence are "acts of cowardice and a degradation of all humanity."<sup>4</sup> It is widely recognized that the more the dignity of women is promoted and protected, the more so too for the family, the community and society. Likewise, every time a woman suffers violence, it is the whole community and society itself that suffer.

Any silence over violent acts perpetrated against women, any impunity of abusers, and any impassivity or indifference towards physical or sexual crimes, is intolerable. Yet,

---

<sup>1</sup> UN Women, *Facts and figures: Ending violence against women*, March 2021.

<sup>2</sup> A/HRC/47/26.

<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, *Address to the members of the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See*, 12 January 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Pope Francis, *Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network*, February 2021.

as highlighted in the report, rape is frequently not reported due to a number of factors, including cultural and social circumstances.

We all have a moral duty to provide victims of violence with the necessary support and protection. In this regard, we must ensure that they can have easy access to structures that provide them with psycho-social, medical, financial and legal assistance in order to foster their healing and social reintegration.

Madam President,

In this context, the Holy See wishes to reaffirm the rights and dignity of children conceived as a result of sexual violence, beginning with their right to life. These children should not become the collateral victims of the abhorrent violence perpetrated against women. Rather, they need to be supported and loved. Likewise, they need attention and programmes to ensure their protection and to foster healing, reconciliation and full integration in the society. Respect for human life and for every person, from conception to natural death, is the starting point for overcoming a culture of violence.

Pope Francis recently affirmed that “by how we treat a woman’s body, we can understand our level of humanity”.<sup>5</sup> There is no doubt that achieving full respect for women requires strong efforts to promote authentic respect for the other, founded on the intrinsic truth of the equal dignity of all persons.<sup>6</sup>

Thank you, Madam President.

---

<sup>5</sup> Pope Francis at the end of the traditional New Year Mass, 1 January 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Pope Francis, *Twitter* account message of 25 November 2020: “If we want a better world, that will be a peaceful home and not a battlefield, we all need to do a lot more for the dignity of each woman”.