



Statement of H.E. Archbishop Fortunatus Nwachukwu, Apostolic Nuncio, Permanent Observer  
of the Holy See to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva  
at the General Segment of the 52<sup>nd</sup> Session of the Human Rights Council  
*Geneva, 3 March 2023*

Mister President,

We find ourselves in what Pope Francis has defined as a Third World War of the globalized world, where the growing number of conflicts may directly involve only certain areas of the planet, but in fact affect them all.<sup>1</sup> In this moment, we are all called to become instruments of peace and work for a renewed sense of common responsibility and solidarity, while, at the same time, fostering a climate of mutual cooperation and trust as the foundation of long-lasting peace.

We have witnessed this task grow over the last year with the conflict in Ukraine, whose death toll is not limited to those who suffer and tragically lose their lives in battle or as the consequences of attacks on civilian infrastructure. This war affects entire regions, including outside Europe, hard hit by the repercussions of the conflict, particularly in the sectors of energy and food production. At the same time, we must not forget all other theatres of tension and conflict across the world, especially in those lands where there are protracted situations of instability. Therefore, it is legitimate to ask ourselves: has everything possible been done to stop these wars?

Every day we have before our eyes the lethal consequences of the continuous recourse to the production and use of new and increasingly sophisticated armaments. Once again, the Holy See renews its call to the international community to proceed along the path of integral disarmament. It is not, in fact, in the possession of weapons that nations will find security, but in a renewed sense of mutual trust and cooperation<sup>2</sup>. As paradoxical as talking about disarmament today may seem the price for not doing so is inevitably paid by the number of innocent lives taken and measured in terms of carnage and destruction<sup>3</sup>. In particular, the return to nuclear threats is of great concern. In this regard, the Holy See would like to reiterate Pope Francis' call for "Efforts in the area of disarmament and the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons that, despite difficulties and reluctance, must be intensified, should also be carried out with regard to chemical and conventional weapons."<sup>4</sup>

Mister President,

In the current global scenario, the war in Ukraine has made the crisis that has long affected the multilateral system even more evident. Indeed, its limits had already been exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, with the unequal distribution of vaccines a glaring example of the law of the strongest prevailing over solidarity, as often denounced by Pope Francis.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Pope Francis, Address to members of the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See, 9 January 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*.

<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, Message to His Excellency Ambassador Alexander Kmentt, President of the first meeting of States Parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, 21 June 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Pope Francis, Address to members of the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See, 8 February 2021.

It is regrettable that, over the years, the lofty instruments of diplomacy and dialogue have been gradually put aside and replaced by the use of force. Even international fora have seen increased attempts of certain States and coalitions to impose their perspective, marginalizing those who express a different view. Such unfortunate polarization of the international debate, which we have also witnessed in this Council on several occasions, is the reflection of what Pope Francis has defined as ideological colonization. One of the most devious and yet widespread methods by which such “colonization” is perpetrated, especially towards poorer and developing countries, involves granting of economic aid to States in need of support only on the condition that they adopt a certain agenda. One of the most egregious examples is the constant promotion of the so-called “right to abortion” by different Government donors, including through programs promoted by UN Agencies. Under the guise of a misinterpreted concept of progress, this coercive approach to international policy undermines the enjoyment of fundamental rights, including, first and foremost the right to life.

When life is not recognized as a value *per se*, it can be bent to particular interests, especially when those affected cannot advocate for and defend themselves. This includes children, the unborn, the sick, the elderly and persons with disabilities. The right to life is also threatened by the practice of the death penalty, which unfortunately is still all too common. No one can claim rights over the life of another human being. Hence, the Holy See would like to reiterate the appeal of Pope Francis to fight against this “throw-away culture”. It is important that States take responsibility towards their citizens and protect life at all stages, from conception to its natural end, especially in the most delicate moments.

Mister President,

In this regard, the Holy See would like to bring to the attention of this Council the plight of many individuals and communities who endure persecution because of their religious beliefs. “Peace - as Pope Francis said - also calls for the universal recognition of religious freedom. It is troubling that people are being persecuted simply because they publicly profess their faith and, in many countries, religious freedom is limited. About a third of the world’s population lives under these conditions.”<sup>5</sup>

In recent years we have witnessed the tightening of repressive measures and abuses, including by national authorities, against religious minorities in many countries across the world. Believers are often denied the right to express and practice their faith, even when this does not endanger public safety or violate the rights of other groups or individuals. Moreover, the desecration and destruction of places of worship and religious sites, as well as violent attacks on religious leaders, have recently escalated and are becoming appallingly more commonplace.

Of no less concern is the condition of believers in certain countries where, behind the façade of tolerance and inclusion, discrimination is perpetrated more subtly and insidiously. In a growing number of countries, we witness the imposition of different forms of censorship that reduce the possibility of expressing one’s convictions both publically and politically with the pretext to avoid offending the sensibilities of others. In this way, much space for healthy dialogue and even public discourse is lost. As this space decreases, so does our ability to express the fundamental right to religious freedom, as well as to thought and conscience, which are also an indispensable prerequisite for achieving peace and building a just society.

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<sup>5</sup> Pope Francis, Address to members of the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See, 9 January 2023.

In this regard, the Holy See “cannot fail to mention, as certain statistics have shown, that one out of every seven Christians experiences persecution.”<sup>6</sup> Pope Francis underscores that “we should not overlook the fact that violence and acts of discrimination against Christians are also increasing in countries where the latter are not a minority. Religious freedom is also endangered wherever believers see their ability to express their convictions in the life of society restricted in the name of a misguided understanding of inclusiveness. Religious freedom, which cannot be reduced simply to freedom of worship, is one of the minimum requisites for a dignified way of life. Governments have the duty to protect this right and to ensure that each person, in a way compatible with the common good, enjoys the opportunity to act in accordance with his or her own conscience, also in the public sphere and in the exercise of their profession.”<sup>7</sup>

Mister President,

The Holy See would like to address the fact that conflicts, socio-political instabilities and, increasingly, natural disasters are among the first drivers of displacement. In addition, the human desire for a better life also pushes more and more people to leave their home and community and emigrate.

Emigrating, however, is not always an easy choice, and very often people embark on dangerous journeys to reach their destinations. In the face of the daily displacement of thousands of individuals risking their lives on unsafe routes in their quest for a better future, often at the mercy of traffickers, the international community cannot look away nor can it limit itself to isolated initiatives. For example, host countries should not be left alone in bearing the burden of migratory flows, but must be supported in their efforts to ensure the protection and promotion of the fundamental rights of persons crossing their borders. As the Pope often insists, it is imperative to cooperate towards collective solutions, “so as to put in place suitable policies for accepting, accompanying, promoting and integrating migrants”<sup>8</sup>.

Additionally, while it is essential to provide humanitarian aid in emergency situations and to promote migrants’ integration in host countries, it is also essential to collaborate at the multilateral level to ensure the right of people to remain in their countries of origin in peace and security.

Lastly, we have before our eyes the effects of climate change and its impact on the enjoyment of human rights by entire populations. To this end, we must also engage in a shared commitment to the protection of our “common home”, by tackling the climate crisis and its effects on migration. This will continue to require the international community to build on the commitments to promote decisive action and correct growth patterns, without which it will be impossible to ensure respect for the environment and the protection of people’s dignity.

Thank you, Mister President.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Ibid