



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 52nd Session of the Human Rights Council
Item 3: Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on
the Freedom of Religion or Belief
14 March 2023

Mister President,

The Delegation of the Holy See takes note of the first Report presented to the Human Rights Council by the Special Rapporteur who assumed her mandate last year. The Holy See has always placed utmost importance on protecting and promoting this fundamental freedom, as it represents the inalienable right of each person to seek and follow the truths that touch the very meaning of humanity.

This Delegation also welcomes the recognition that “religious or belief institutions should have the freedom to manage their own basic affairs, including the freedom to choose their religious leaders, priests and teachers or other representation, in line with their practices, convictions and autonomy”, as well as the importance of ensuring the right of religious institutions to autonomously define their own beliefs and institutional structure, without coercion.¹

The Holy See reaffirms that no expression of religion or religious values can be considered authentic if it promotes hatred, violence, discrimination or conflict.² Competent authorities, in promoting the common good, have a responsibility to ensure that such expressions of pseudo-religious values are adequately addressed, to ensure that the human dignity and rights of all are upheld.

At the same time, it is of utmost importance to ensure that the right to conscientious objection is ensured. While the State may legitimately limit the manifestation of religious beliefs in situations of particular emergency and in accordance to International Law, this must never be extended to any form of coercion to act against one’s conscience or beliefs. In this regard, the Holy See encourages the Special Rapporteur, in the work of her mandate, to clearly distinguish between manifesting one’s religious or conscientious beliefs, and the choice to *refrain from* a certain action because of those beliefs. While the former can be legitimately curtailed, the latter would imply a *de facto* coercion that is in direct contradiction to the intimate and inalienable right to the freedom to believe.

Mister President,

Allow me to conclude by quoting Pope Francis in his Address to the Members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, earlier this year: “*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.*”³

Thank you, Mister President.

¹ A/HRC/52/38, n. 45.

² Cfr. Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together, 4 February 2019.

³ Pope Francis, Address to members of the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See, 9 January 2023.