



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

Mister President,

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 has 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>1</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 publicly 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.

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>2</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>3</sup>

Thank you, Mister President.

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

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid