



Statement of H.E. Archbishop Ettore Balestrero, Apostolic Nuncio
Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations
and Other International Organizations in Geneva
at the 74th Executive Session of the UNCTAD Trade and Development Board

Item 6 Statement: Report on UNCTAD assistance to the Palestinian People

Geneva, 21 November 2023

Mr. President,

My Delegation would first like to express its gratitude for the report, which outlines UNCTAD's invaluable assistance to the Palestinian people. Now, more than ever, UNCTAD plays a key role in supporting the Palestinian people through economic strategies, policy-oriented research, public and private sector capacity-building projects, and technical cooperation.

The Holy See remains fully committed to promoting peace and justice in Israel and Palestine. In this context, and in view of the tragic bloodshed in the region, my Delegation wishes to make the following observations.

First, the Holy See has unequivocally and irrevocably condemned the inhuman terrorist attack perpetrated by Hamas on 7 October against innocent civilians in Israel. The attack resulted in the brutal killing and injuring of thousands of people and the taking of hundreds of hostages, including children and the elderly. My Delegation reiterates the call of Pope Francis for the immediate release of all hostages held in Gaza.¹ Terrorism and extremism fuel hatred, violence and revenge, and cause mutual suffering.

Second, while the Holy See reaffirms the right to self-defense, all parties must always comply with international humanitarian law, including the principle of proportionality.² My Delegation wishes to reiterate the Holy See's deep concern at the catastrophic humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, which has resulted in the loss of thousands of innocent Palestinian lives, including more than 5,000 innocent children. This indiscriminate suffering of the population is unacceptable. The Holy See calls for the effective protection of each and every civilian. In this regard, the Holy See urges that the access of humanitarian aid is guaranteed.

¹ Cf. Pope Francis, General Audience, 11 October 2023.

² Cf. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church, 501.

In this context, I would like to pay tribute also to the over one hundred UNRWA staff members who have been killed in Gaza in the last few weeks.

Finally, the Holy See echoes the plea of Pope Francis for all parties to immediately cease using weapons!³ “Terrorism and war do not lead to any resolutions, but only to the death and suffering of many innocent people. War is a defeat! Every war is a defeat.”⁴

Mr. President,

My Delegation calls on the authorities of Israel and Palestine to boldly renew their commitment to a peace based on justice and respect for the legitimate aspirations of both sides. Although the path of dialogue may currently seem limited, it is the only practical solution for a long-term end to the ongoing violence affecting Christians, Jews and Muslims in the region. The Holy See is confident that a two-State solution remains a viable option for achieving this peace.

Mr. President,

Allow me to conclude by quoting extensively at length Pope Francis’ plea for peace. I hope that his words will deeply resonate within the hearts of all those present in this room, and those who advocate for peace and justice in the region:

“May the weapons be stopped: they will never lead to peace, and may the conflict not widen! Enough! Enough, brothers! In Gaza, let the wounded be rescued immediately, let civilians be protected, let far more humanitarian aid be allowed to reach that stricken population. May the hostages be freed, including the elderly and children. Every human being, Christian, Jewish, Muslim, of any people or religion, every human being is sacred, is precious in the eyes of God and has the right to live in peace. Let us not lose hope: let us pray and work tirelessly so that the sense of humanity may prevail over hardness of heart.”⁵

Thank you, Mr. President.

³ Cf. Pope Francis, Angelus, 5 November 2023.

⁴ Pope Francis, Angelus, 8 October 2023.

⁵ Pope Francis, Angelus, 12 November 2023.