



**Statement of H.E. Archbishop Ettore Balestrero, Apostolic Nuncio,  
Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations  
and Other International Organisations in Geneva  
at the General Segment of the 55<sup>th</sup> Session of the Human Rights Council**

Mr. President,

Last December we celebrated the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This was a significant milestone in establishing a universal standard of fundamental human rights and freedoms.

My Delegation, however, is concerned that violations of human rights are still occurring globally despite the passage of time, including those against freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Discrimination and persecution of believers are on the rise. Religious freedom is violated in almost one third of the world's countries, affecting around 4.9 billion people.<sup>1</sup> In some Western countries, religious discrimination and censorship are being perpetrated under the guise of 'tolerance and inclusion'. Legislation originally aimed at combatting 'hate speech', is often instrumentalised to challenge the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, leading to censorship and 'compelled speech'.

Mr. President,

"Our world has become so multipolar and at the same time so complex that a different framework for effective cooperation is required. [We need] to react with global mechanisms to the environmental public health, cultural and social challenges, especially in order to consolidate respect for the most elementary human rights."<sup>2</sup> As Pope Francis has repeatedly emphasized, "everything is connected" and "no one is saved alone". "All this presupposes the development of a new procedure for decision-making and legitimizing those decisions, since the one put in place several decades ago is not sufficient nor does it appear effective."<sup>3</sup>

In pursuing this ambitious goal, we must not forget that at the heart of the UDHR lies a fundamental truth that provides the only road-map to an integral and just development, as well as for deep and lasting peace. This truth is the dignity of the human person, a truth that the Declaration recognises as the foundation of peace and human rights, justice, and freedom.<sup>4</sup>

Putting back human dignity in our discussions would help International organisations avoid stalemate in their daily work. Agencies that were devoted to the common good and technical issues could overcome the current paralysis due to ideological polarisation and exploitation by individual states.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Aid to the Church in Need, Global Report 2023 on Religious Freedom in the World.

<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Laudate Deum*, n. 42.

<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Laudate Deum*, n. 43.

<sup>4</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 1.

To improve multilateral diplomacy, it is important to uphold values that are rooted in human dignity. This requires rebuilding a shared vision of our inherent nature, which entails obligations and moral norms that can be understood through human reason and must be respected. In essence, we cannot separate what is good from what is true and what is deeply rooted in our human nature.

Human dignity must become the guiding principle also in the development and use of artificial intelligence. Advancements in this field should respect fundamental human rights and ought to serve, not compete with, our human potential. They should promote, not hinder, personal relationships, fraternity, critical thinking, and a capacity for discernment. Respect for human dignity requires that we reject any attempt to reduce the uniqueness of the human person to be identified or reduced to an algorithm or to a set of data, and that we do not allow sophisticated systems to autonomously decide the fate of human beings. The development of artificial intelligence can only be considered successful if we act responsibly and uphold fundamental human values.

Mr. President,

Many of the challenges we face today stem from a lack of respect for human dignity and a failure to recognize our interconnectedness. This often leads to negative consequences, which are evident in our society.

Current attempts to introduce so called “new rights” are not always consistent with what is truly good for the human person. Such attempts lead to an “ideological colonisation” that undermines human dignity, creating divisions between cultures, societies, and States, rather than fostering unity and peace. Our societies “must continue to rise on the foundations of a right understanding of universal fraternity and respect for the sacredness of every human life, of every man and every woman, the poor, the elderly, children, the infirm, the unborn, the unemployed, the abandoned, those considered disposable because they are only considered as part of a statistic.”<sup>5</sup>

The principles of human fraternity and solidarity should once again be at the heart of our work. Fraternity has been at core value of the multilateral system since the founding of the United Nations. The Preamble and the first Articles of the UN founding Charter recognise that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights, and should act towards one another in a spirit of fraternity. The universal fraternity is an essential condition for the full realisation of human rights in today’s world. When we fail to acknowledge that we are all interconnected, we all suffer.

My Delegation hopes that the session of the Human Rights Council will objectively identify and address the ongoing violations of fundamental human rights, determine their root causes, and take active measures to end these violations and the atrocities they often lead to. It is our hope that human dignity and fraternity will guide us during these weeks.

Thank you, Mr. President.

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<sup>5</sup> Pope Francis, Address to the United Nations General Assembly, 25 September 2015.