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Intervention of the Holy See Permanent Observer at the United Nations and other international bodies in Geneva at the 36th Session of the Human Rights Council

The following is the intervention the Holy See Permanent Observer at the United Nations and other international bodies in Geneva, H.E. Archbishop Ivan Jurković, pronounced on Monday 25 September at the 36th Session of the Human Rights Council on the theme: *Panel Discussion on the impact of racial discrimination on Human Rights of Women and Girls*:

Intervention of H.E. Msgr. Ivan Jurković

Mr. Chairman,

My Delegation thanks the distinguished panellists for their presentations and appreciates the commitments of some States concerning the elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, which should be a priority objective of the international community.

Mr. Chairman,

In a world where globalisation should bring people together, what we are seeing today is the resurgence of divisions, which are more and more accentuated. An increased fragmentation of social relations in our multicultural societies, with spontaneous acts and words of racism and xenophobia, social and racial discrimination, and political exploitation of differences, is evident in everyday experience.¹ This social fragmentation underscores the fact that spatial proximity of persons is not of itself sufficient to create the conditions for constructive interaction and peaceful communion. The lack of real solidarity can lead to hatred and racial intolerance in any society, no matter how advanced it may consider itself.

Furthermore, we are now facing an emergency crisis in migration management, as the movement of peoples has accelerated in recent years for several reasons, often dramatic, such as wars, forced displacement and natural disasters. Within this context, women and girls first and foremost face many challenges and difficulties

and are disproportionately affected by aggravated forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. In various parts of the world, women are too often undervalued for the sole fact of being women. Besides, their vulnerability is heightened if they are also part of a national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minority.

As Pope Francis said, “the contribution of women in all areas of human activity is undeniable”² and we must raise awareness in this regard in order to address various difficulties suffered by women and girls. Such recognition “must first and foremost be won through an effective and intelligent campaign for the promotion of women, concentrating on all areas of women’s life and beginning with a universal recognition of the dignity of women”.³

Mr. Chairman,

It is increasingly urgent, nowadays, to recognise and attribute full respect to every person, to their dignity, identity, history and tradition. A very effective antidote to every form of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance is education in discovering, recognising and accepting differences as a richness rather than an obstacle. Education should accompany legislation in shaping mentalities and helping to form consciences that embrace a more comprehensive view of reality and reject any form of racism and racial discrimination.

The family, the basic social unit of society, and schools have a pivotal role in teaching openness and acceptance of others, and the educational system must raise awareness on the equality in dignity and fundamental rights of all people, and of the need that all women should be granted access to the full exercise of their human rights. Government agencies, mass media and all the stakeholders must be alerted to avoid any kind of stereotyping of persons on the grounds of race and sex, and must join the rest of society in upholding human dignity which only a collective action of all sectors of society can protect and promote. It is not enough to recognise equality: it has to be created within a society of human equity in dignity and rights.

Finally, Mr. Chairman,

The Holy See reaffirms its strong condemnation of all forms of racial discrimination against all persons, and in a particular way against women, whose active presence in society provides an irreplaceable value in political, economic and social life. Pope Francis reminds us that “the problem of intolerance must be confronted in all its forms: wherever any minority is persecuted and marginalised because of their religious convictions or ethnic identity, the wellbeing of society as a whole is endangered, and each one of us must feel affected”.⁴ Therefore, to overcome the moral bankruptcy of prejudice, it is essential to put in place a real solidarity at the social, national and international level, founded on the recognition of everyone as having equal human worth.

Thank you, Mr. President.

1 Intervention by the Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations Office and Specialized Agencies at the Durban Review Conference, Geneva, 22 April 2009.

2 Pope Francis’ Message, Vatican City, 3 May 2016.

3 Letter of Pope John Paul II to Women, 25 June 1995.

4 Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to The Delegation of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, Clementine Hall, Thursday, 24 October 2013.

