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INTERVENTO DELLA DELEGAZIONE DELLA SANTA SEDE ALL'INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON WAR-AFFECTED CHILDREN

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Pubblichiamo di seguito l'intervento che S.E. Mons. Diarmuid Martin, Segretario del Pontificio Consiglio della Giustizia e della Pace, ha pronunciato in qualità di Delegato della Santa Sede all'*International Conference on War-Affected Children* che si è svolta il 16 e 17 settembre 2000 a Winnipeg (Canada):

Mr. Chairman,

The Holy See wishes, first of all, to commend the Government of Canada for calling this important Conference and hopes that the fruits of our reflection will generate a new momentum in the ongoing efforts of a wide coalition of actors to address the question of children and war.

1. Fight the spread of small arms

On behalf of the Holy See, I wish to address the question of the flow of small arms to areas of conflict and the effect this has on children. The world has looked on in horror at images of children brandishing, at times apparently cherishing possession of small arms in many conflict zones. Let us not be misled by the term "small arms". What we are talking about are quite often sophisticated instruments of death, capable of terrorizing, killing and maiming, as well as brutalizing those who use them. The effects of such direct participation by very young people in direct killing and in witnessing merciless violence has been examined in these days, but the personal wound and trauma caused is truly hard for us to fully imagine.

For the first time in many years, the question of small arms is being addressed more systematically by the community of nations. We must have the courage to address the question of illicit trading in small arms coherently and openly, in a broad and realistic context. We cannot hide the fact that legally-produced and legally-transferred small arms all too often end up in illicit use. When it is a question of these falling into the hands of children, the moral responsibility, both of producers and governments, to prevent illegitimate end-use cannot be evaded.

At the end of conflicts, all efforts must be used to collect arms that have been used and to ensure wherever possible their effective destruction, so that the already enormous stock of these weapons be reduced. Failing destruction, it should be possible to ensure that such arms are removed from conflict areas and are safely stored under effective and verifiable control, where necessary with international verification.

The collection of weapons used in conflicts should also permit more accurate examination of the origin of these weapons. Such information should be provided for the public domain and the evidence of the major avenues of illicit trafficking, by both private and public actors, should be made known. The community of nations should clearly make it known that violations of norms in this area will not be accepted.

2. Military expenditures and the fight against poverty

War and conflict constitute one of the most serious obstacles to development and one of the major causes of the plague of poverty. We are witnessing a renewed efforts on the part of the community of nations to unite in the fight against poverty and to realize agreed common time-bound commitments. Countries are working on the elaboration of poverty reduction strategies, in an effort to make the most effective use of development assistance and the benefits that in some cases may accrue from debt relief.

It would be most appropriate if such poverty reduction strategies also addressed openly the question of military expenses and efforts were made by nations to limit military expenditure to an acceptable percentage level of national expenditure. Regional groupings could also work together to fix targets for capping such military expenditures at an mutually acceptable level for an entire region, thus contributing to regional security.

Conclusion

The question of war-affected children is intimately linked to the question of the movement of small arms. It is to be hoped that interested nations and groups will work together to ensure progress on the establishment of effective international norms on both. You can be sure of the support of the Holy See in this effort for the good of the world's children.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman

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