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INTERVENTO DELL'OSSERVATORE PERMANENTE DELLA SANTA SEDE PRESSO L'ORGANIZZAZIONE DELLE NAZIONI UNITE ALLA 55MA SESSIONE DELL'ASSEMBLEA GENERALE SUL TEMA DEL DISARMO

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Pubblichiamo di seguito l'intervento che l'Osservatore Permanente della Santa Sede presso l'Organizzazione delle Nazioni Unite, S.E. Mons. Renato Martino, ha pronunciato ieri nel corso della 55ma Sessione dell'Assemblea Generale *on Item 74 "General and Complete Disarmament"*.

● INTERVENTO DI S.E. MONS. RENATO MARTINO

Mr. Chairman,

At this first meeting of the Disarmament Committee in the new century, let us resolve at the outset to develop the concept of a culture of peace as an integral approach to preventing violence and armed conflicts. That is indeed the goal of the International Year for the Culture of Peace.

At the basis of a culture of peace is respect for life and for all human rights. Constructing such a culture requires comprehensive educational, social and civic action. This will lead to the "civilization of love," as described by Pope John Paul II, and it is this aspiration at the dawn of the Third Millennium that the peoples of the world so ardently long for.

Since the first duty of the United Nations is to preserve and promote peace throughout the world, this Committee has a vital role to play in establishing political norms for peace. The nations of the world pledged at the recent Millennium Summit to "spare no effort to free our peoples from the scourge of war, whether within or between States, which has claimed more than five million lives in the past decade." To carry out this pledge, nations must build respect for the rule of law, and ensure compliance with the U.N. Charter and the decisions of the International Court of Justice.

How easy it is to say these words; yet how difficult to practice them. After three years of steady decline, the number of wars fought world-wide increased significantly in 1999, when there were no less than forty armed

conflicts being fought on the territories of 36 countries. Sixteen of these conflicts took place in Africa, 14 in Asia, 6 in the Middle East, 2 in Europe and 2 in the Americas. These conflicts, fed by arms dealers with a rapacious appetite for money, are a scandal of modern civilization.

The widespread availability of small arms and light weapons contributes towards intensifying conflicts by increasing the lethality and duration of violence; they generate a vicious circle of a greater sense of insecurity, which in turn leads to a greater demand for the use of these weapons. It is an even greater shame that many small arms are readily obtainable by children who are enslaved into being combatants and porters by warring factions.

It is no accident that the vast majority of states experiencing war are among the most poverty-stricken. These conflicts, which consume large amounts of resources needed for economic and social development, are responsible for the displacement of people, the vast majority civilian, mostly women and children. The easy availability of small arms and light weapons has led to the targeting of U.N. peacekeeping and humanitarian field staff. The U.N.'s development projects and those of donor countries are often destroyed when groups carrying these weapons ransack towns and villages.

All this has been the study of a number of expert groups, preparing the way for the 2001 Conference on "Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in all Its Aspects." The Holy See gives its full support to this Conference in the hope that it will develop and strengthen international efforts to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons.

While norms and international measures need to be advanced, most of all it is political will throughout the world that must be developed to stop the trafficking in weapons, licit and illicit. States must exercise their responsibility with regard to the export, import, transit and re-transfer of small arms and light weapons. Let the international community at least implement the Millennium Declaration pledge "to take concerted action to end illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons, especially by making arms transfers more transparent and supporting regional disarmament measures."

Despite the immense suffering still caused by wars, we should not lose sight of the gains that are being made in reducing weaponry. Since the Anti-Personnel Landmines Treaty went into effect in 1999, 10 million stockpiled anti-personnel mines have been destroyed, bringing the total, so far, to 22 million. It is true that an estimated 250 million mines remain stockpiled in 105 nations, but at least the trade in such evil instruments has almost completely halted. The treaty that has brought this about has been signed by 139 governments and ratified by 105. Some major countries are still outside the treaty, and the Holy See appeals to them to join this important movement in the world community to avert even more human suffering by so many innocent victims of warfare.

This past year has also seen the *Sixth Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (April 27, 2000)*, in which 187 States made "an unequivocal undertaking to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals." The Conference also agreed on 13 practical steps for the systematic and progressive efforts to implement Article VI of the Treaty.

In his intervention to this Conference, Archbishop Tauran, Secretary for the Holy Sees's Relations with States, noted that: "The actual stage of nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament indicates that at the dawn of a new century many still believe in the use of force and count on nuclear weapons. This means that the rule of law, confidence in others and the will to dialogue are not yet priorities. It also indicates the relative value of a concept like "nuclear deterrence", a distressing solution for a world overwhelmed with weapons, which should be turning instead toward progressive and effective disarmament".

Why should it be so difficult for the Nuclear Weapons States to take leadership in implementing these progressive steps to nuclear disarmament? Such a question bring us face to face with a searing question for modern humanity: "Do we really want peace? If we reply yes, then we are bound to verify it: there will be no peace in a world which continues to produce more and more sophisticated arms, which prepares itself for their use or where peace is only maintained by a balance of terror. The time has come to get rid of the inherited mind-

sets of the Cold War and to resolve the problems connected with the establishment of mutual security" (ibid.).

The Holy See welcomes the U.N. Millennium Summit Declaration, which resolved "to strive for the elimination of weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons..." The Secretary-General's proposal for a global conference to identify ways of eliminating nuclear dangers should be taken into consideration.

The United Nations must play a leading role in advancing measures for nuclear disarmament because the Organization has the ability to gather together the world community and express its collective will for peace and human security.

My Delegation would like to repeat here the words of Angelo Cardinal Sodano, Secretary of State, at the Millennium Summit: "...the U.N. needs to develop its capacities in the area of preventive diplomacy. For its part, the Holy See will always support initiatives in favour of peace, including those aimed to strengthening respect for international law and controlling arms proliferation."

Moreover, at the Millennium Summit, the leaders of the world have solemnly renewed their commitment to promote the building of a new century based on a culture of peace. We really believe the peoples of the world want a culture of peace. To achieve this lofty goal States must work to develop and extend policies that promote human security, new coalitions and negotiations, the rule of law, initiatives at peacemaking, democratic decision-making and humanitarian intervention mandated by the Security Council. In such a culture, there would be a reversal of present policies in which billions of dollars are spent on arms and militarization while worthwhile development initiatives and programs for peace and human security are starved for lack of funds.

A culture of peace is possible, but first we must develop the moral and political will.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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