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INTERVENTO DELL'OSSERVATORE PERMANENTE DELLA SANTA SEDE ALLA LV SESSIONE ORDINARIA DELL'ASSEMBLEA GENERALE DELL'ONU

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Nell'ambito del dibattito sul tema: "*United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East*", svoltosi presso il Comitato Politico Speciale dell'Assemblea Generale, S.E. Mons. Renato R. Martino, Osservatore Permanente della Santa Sede presso le Nazioni Unite, ha pronunciato il 30 ottobre scorso l'intervento che pubblichiamo qui di seguito:

My Delegation notes with appreciation the valuable services rendered by UNRWA in bringing food, shelter and clothing as well as educational services and health care to Palestinian refugees since it was established in 1950.

UNRWA continues to service the Palestinian refugees, those still in camps in Jordan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon, some of whom have never experienced life in their own home or homeland and those who now reside in areas administered by the Palestinian Authority.

His Eminence Cardinal Angelo Sodano, Secretary of State, speaking at the Millennium Summit, 8 September 2000, noted, "Christians who this year have been commemorating the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem feel solidarity for the efforts which the international community is undertaking so that the world of the future may be freed from violence, injustice and selfishness."

Mr. Chairman, the recent outbreak of violence in many of the areas served by UNRW A is a cause of grave concern for my Delegation. The deaths and injury of so many; the disruption of vital social services; the needs of scores of families whose members have suffered as a result of the violence, place even greater demands on the limited resources of those agencies attempting to provide some level of normalcy in the lives of the refugees.

During his pilgrimage to the Holy Land in March of this year, Pope John Paul II visited the Deheisheh refugee camp in Bethlehem, 22 March 2000. During that visit he stated:

"I greet each of you, and I hope and pray that my visit will bring some comfort in your difficult situation. Please

God it will help to draw attention to your continuing plight. You have been deprived of many things which represent basic needs of the human person: proper housing, health care, education and work Above all you bear the sad memory of what you were forced to leave behind, not just material possessions, but your freedom, the closeness of relatives, and familiar surroundings and cultural traditions which nourish your personal and family life".

The Holy See calls upon the international community to continue to assist the Israelis and the Palestinians in bringing an end to violence and in addressing the basic issues of justice and freedom called for by Pope John Paul II.

The humanitarian aid provided to the refugees by UNRWA, and the Pontifical Mission for Palestine, which was founded in 1949, will continue. However, they should not be understood as a substitute for just, stable and definitive solution to the problems of the region.

It is the hope of my Delegation that this solution will include the question of the city of Jerusalem.

In light of the recent violence the Holy See renews its consistent call for an internationally guaranteed statute to safeguard the sites sacred to Jews, Christians and Muslims. The Holy See notes that for some time now the unique character of Jerusalem has resulted in a "de facto" situation which has given control of the sacred sites to the appropriate religious authorities regardless of who has had political control. The proper recognition of the spiritual patrimony of the three monotheistic religions, under international guarantees, must be a part of the negotiation process which will bring peace to the region. Because Jerusalem holds such spiritual importance to believers representing almost forty-five percent of the world's population, as recommended by the General Assembly, in its resolution of 25 April 1997 (A/RES/ES-10/2) and reaffirmed thereafter, *"a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of the City of Jerusalem, which should be reached in permanent status negotiations between the parties, should include internationally guaranteed provisions to ensure the freedom of religion and of conscience of its inhabitants, as well as permanent, free and unhindered access to the Holy Places by the faithful of all religions and nationalities"*. Moreover, my Delegation believes that the Holy Places should receive protection from their use for political gain.

Mr. Chairman, my Delegation appeals for greater international solidarity and the political will to meet the challenge of ending violence and bringing justice and security to all the peoples in the regions served by UNRWA and numerous NGO agencies. Pope John Paul II, in speaking to the refugees in Deheisheh urged them *"...to continue to strive through education to take your rightful place in society, despite the difficulties and handicaps that you have to face because of your refugee status. Do not think that your present conditions make you any less important in God's eyes! Never forget your dignity as His children!"*

Mr. Chairman, my Delegation finds it fitting to conclude its remarks with the words spoken by His Holiness to the camp workers and volunteers at Deheisheh, since they apply well to all members of UNRWA serving the Palestinian refugees:

"Believe in the task that your are fulfilling! Genuine and practical solidarity with those in need is not a favor conceded, it is a demand of our shared humanity and a recognition of the dignity of every human being."

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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