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PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLS

# BOLLETTINO

SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

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## INTERVENTO DELLA SANTA SEDE ALLA QUARTA COMMISSIONE DELL'ASSEMBLEA GENERALE DELLE NAZIONI UNITE

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NAZIONI UNITE

Pubblichiamo di seguito l'intervento che l'Osservatore Permanente della Santa Sede presso l'O.N.U., S.E. Mons. Renato Raffaele Martino, ha pronunciato ieri alla Quarta Commissione dell'Assemblea Generale delle Nazioni Unite *"on Item 87 - United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine"*.

### • INTERVENTO DI S.E. MONS. RENATO R. MARTINO

Mr. Chairman:

My Delegation comes before you this year with an exceptionally heavy heart. The events of 11 September seem to have cast a dark shadow upon the life of this city which in turn has a profound effect throughout the world.

However this is but one tragedy which makes my Delegation heavy of heart. Although they were founded as temporary agencies, UNRWA and the Pontifical Mission for Palestine have labored to assist the Palestinian Refugees for over fifty years.

Each year we come before this Committee with an intervention and I am sorry to say that each year our observations are the same. Violence in Israel and the Occupied Territories continues to take innocent lives. His Holiness Pope John Paul II traveled as a pilgrim to this region, the birthplace of Christianity. His was a pilgrimage of hope to share in the sufferings of the people of the region and to speak on behalf of the recognition of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all peoples. "We know", His Holiness stated during his recent pilgrimage to Syria, following in the steps of St. Paul, "that real peace can only be achieved if there is a new attitude of understanding and respect between the peoples of the region, between the followers of the three Abrahamic religions...It is important that there be an evolution in the way the peoples of the region see one another and that at every level of society the principles of peaceful coexistence be taught and promoted." (*Pope John Paul II, Remarks upon arrival in Damascus, Syria, 5 May 2001*).

Mr. Chairman, my Delegation wishes to point out that when normal conditions of life are not granted, the security

of all is threatened. In particular, I note the incursions into the Christian towns of Bethlehem, Beit Sahour and Beit Jala. The Pontifical University in Bethlehem has suffered shell damage as well as the Patriarchal Seminary, the Pontifical School for the Deaf and the Holy Family Hospital. Numerous houses in these towns have sustained damage from artillery and as a result, the Pontifical Mission for Palestine has been making emergency grants to aid with repairs or for the relocation of the residents.

Most recently, in response to the violence of 20 October, His Holiness Pope John Paul II stated: "At the present time there is no lack of threatening situations which fill all of mankind with anxiety. It is with deep sadness that I receive painful and worrisome news from Bethlehem, as well as from the cities of Beit Jala and Beit Sahour. War and death have even arrived at the square of the Basilica of the Nativity of Our Lord. In the name of God, I repeat once again: violence is for everyone a path of death and destruction which dishonors the holiness of God and the dignity of man. I express to the families who are victims of violence my closeness in their pain, in prayer and in hope. They have the gift of living in the Holy Land, land which is holy for Jews, Christians and Muslims. It must be everyone's commitment to make this finally a land of peace and fraternity." (Pope John Paul II, Angelus message, St. Peter's Square, 21 October, 2001).

Even with the heightened tensions in the areas, I am pleased to report that the students of the Pontifical University of Bethlehem completed the extended school year with graduation on 21 July 2001. Besides that, the Pontifical Mission for Palestine was able to build and open "Brotherhood Park", a playground and family park in Gaza City. In Bethlehem the Marie Doty Park was opened for the city's children and their families.

Together with the assistance of European agencies: Misereor, Missio, Kinderhilfe Bethlehem and the Archdiocese of Cologne as well as the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, the Pontifical Mission for Palestine has been able to institute and fund "Labor Intensive Programs". In order to put the unemployed to work, projects which will benefit the community at large are sponsored. Schools, public as well as private, are painted and shared public areas are cleared of refuse and debris.

The local facilities provide the material resources needed to do the work and the project's funds pay a just wage to the laborer. Work is done in collaboration with local agencies such as the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, *Caritas Internationalis* and the St. Vincent de Paul Society. Much more work remains to be accomplished by the Pontifical Mission for Palestine and UNRWA with and for the refugee population.

Beyond addressing these significant humanitarian needs noted above, Mr. Chairman, it is the hope of my Delegation that any solution found for the multifaceted problems of the region will include the question of the Holy City of Jerusalem. In light of the numerous incidents of violence and the rigors of imposed closures, the Holy See renews its consistent call for "...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". (*A/Res/ES 10-2, 5 May 1997*). Current levels of violence have caused pilgrims to stay away from the Holy Land thus imposing severe economic penalties on all the people of the region. I also note that the local population does not have free access to their shrines and holy places.

Mr. Chairman, my Delegation appeals for greater international solidarity and the political will to meet the challenge of the seemingly unending violence in the region. The arms manufacturers of the world have the region awash in weapons. These weapons help to fuel the fire of violence throughout the entire area.

Further, my Delegation appeals to the international community to assist in bringing a just resolution to the differences between the peoples of the Holy Land who are all cousins in the Abrahamic faith. Only a just peace will bring genuine security to all the peoples of the region.

Mr. Chairman, may I conclude my statement with the recent remarks of Pope John Paul II as he completed the first part of his pilgrimage, retracing the steps of St. Paul: "But for the door of peace to open, fundamental issues of truth and justice, of rights and responsibilities must be resolved. The world looks to the Middle East with hope and concern, expectantly awaiting every sign of constructive dialogue. Many serious obstacles remain, yet the first step towards peace must be a steadfast conviction that a solution is possible within the parameters of

international law and the resolutions of the United Nations. I appeal once more to all the peoples involved, and to their political leaders, to recognize that confrontation has failed and will always fail. Only a just peace can bring the conditions needed for the economic, cultural and social development to which the peoples of the region have a right." (*Pope John Paul II, Farewell Ceremony, International Airport of Damascus, 8 May 2001*).

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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