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INTERVENTO DELL'OSSERVATORE PERMANENTE DELLA SANTA SEDE PRESSO L'O.N.U. ALLA SESTA COMMISSIONE SU "INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION AGAINST THE REPRODUCTIVE CLONING OF HUMAN BEINGS"

INTERVENTO DELL'OSSERVATORE PERMANENTE DELLA SANTA SEDE PRESSO L'O.N.U. ALLA SESTA
COMMISSIONE SU "*INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION AGAINST THE REPRODUCTIVE CLONING OF
HUMAN BEINGS*"

Pubblichiamo di seguito l'intervento che l'Osservatore Permanente della Santa Sede presso l'Organizzazione delle Nazioni Unite, S.E. Mons. Raffaele Renato Martino, ha pronunciato ieri mattina alla Sesta Commissione dell'O.N.U. su "*International Convention against the reproductive cloning of human beings*":

● INTERVENTO DI S.E. MONS. R. RENATO MARTINO

Mr. Chairman:

The discussion which has been taken up by this Committee, which will lead to achieving universal agreement in the creation of a normative instrument, valid for all the world, is relevant and is of urgency. Opening the possibility of a generation of human beings with an impoverished genetic heritage compared to those who enjoy a paternal and maternal genetic heritage, those born as a result of cloning would begin life as an anomaly in terms of the relationship with parents and relatives through an act of predetermination which is at the same time deliberate and arbitrary in relation to their corporeity.

The ethical and juridical consequences which will arise from this act would contaminate and desecrate the future of humankind. The United Nations is called to ensure that the human dignity and equality are protected, not only at an economic level but it is called first and foremost to ensure that human dignity and life within the family is protected.

The proposal presented by the Permanent Representatives of France and of Germany, to the Secretary General, on 7 August 2001, to insert an additional item entitled "International Convention against Cloning for Reproductive Purposes", into the Agenda of the Fifty-sixth Session, requires the special attention of the international community and my Delegation welcomes this opportunity to offer its comments on the subject.

The proposal under discussion is certainly linked to the discussions held last August, between experts and the general public, following a special meeting of the United States Academy of Science.

At that meeting, experts made the explosive proposal to initiate the practice of cloning for reproductive purposes as a technique of assisted procreation for couples who are unable to conceive a child naturally, or by using other recognized methods.

That proposal would place cloning within the practices of assisted procreation. This was an idea that, up to that time, had never been given serious consideration and came after cloning for reproductive purposes had met with widespread rejection by international bodies.

Those attending that meeting of the Academy of Sciences, rejected the use of cloning at a scientific level as a dangerous adventure, with serious risks and predictable failures. Cloning was condemned by scientists of noted fame, including the pioneers in the cloning of animals.

The Holy See had already expressed its position on 25 June 1997, in analytical fashion, in a document of the Pontifical Academy for Life entitled *"Reflections on Cloning"*. The statement provided a moral and ethical argument for the rejection of all aspects of human cloning.

During this discussion in the Sixth Committee, the Holy See repeats its position, calling for the rejection and prohibition of any and all aspects relating to the cloning of humans, on a moral and ethical basis.

This opposition, by the Holy See, and the reason for this discussion, is not derived only from the risks of malformation or the death of the embryo as a result of predictable failures but first and foremost upon anthropological and ethical reasons.

In fact, this discussion is based upon the generation of a child outside the act of personal love. Such an act excludes paternity and maternity and is an asexual and agamic conception, thus resulting in a lack of union between the person and the gametes.

The act of cloning is a predetermined act which forces the image and likeness of the donor and is actually a form of imposing dominion over another human being which denies the human dignity of the child and makes him or her a slave to the will of others. The child would be seen as an object and a product of one's fancy rather than as a unique human being, equal in dignity to those who 'created' him or her. The practice of cloning would usurp the role of creator and would thus be seen as an offence before God.

Referring to the rights of man, the Permanent Representatives of France and Germany drew attention to the *"Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights"*, adopted by UNESCO in 1997, and emphasized, in particular, Article 11 which affirms: "Practices which are contrary to human dignity, such as reproductive cloning of human beings, shall not be permitted."

That statement comes from the reference to the fundamental rights to equality, to freedom, and to non-discrimination enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which are based upon the truth of the specific and inalienable dignity of every human being. That very dignity cannot be the object or the instrument of the will of other people.

To have the United Nations and governments of the world committed to a juridical instrument of the highest validity is more than justified.

In the international ethical and juridical order, this objective should be a necessary first step, capable of giving to this challenge the significance it deserves, a challenge which is new in our time, in which international law is called upon to defend human life and future generations from the possible abuses of science and technology. Science, indeed, is one of the most important factors in progress, but at the same time it is one of the powers

that can be abused with unpredictable and negative effects.

Science, which is born from a noble endeavor of the human intellect, specifically because of its dignity and the benefits that it has brought, and can bring to humankind, must be kept free from every form of abuse and every form of submission to the interests of any party. This protection is the responsibility of decision makers within governments as well as those within the scientific community.

There remains, however the fact that reproductive cloning is only part of the overall issue. Therapeutic cloning, the production of human embryos as suppliers of specialized stem cells, embryos to be used in the treatment of certain illnesses and then destroyed, must be addressed and prohibited. This exploitation of human beings, sought by certain scientific and industrial circles, and pushed forward by underlying economic interests, retains all its ethical repugnance as an even more serious offence against human dignity and the right to life, since it involves human beings (embryos) who are created in order to be destroyed.

Moreover, the cloning of human embryos has been declared unnecessary, on a scientific level since those same stem cells can be obtained by other, acceptable means.

One would think that the defense of life may, at an ethical level encounter obstacles of such a kind that they can only be removed gradually, but the principle that human beings (embryos) should not be used as an object or "sacrificed" is always valid, even when others might benefit from that practice.

Every human being has the right to life and, "As far as the right to life is concerned, every innocent human being is absolutely equal to all others. This equality is the basis of all authentic social relationships which, to be truly such, can only be founded on truth and justice, recognizing and protecting every man and woman as a person and not as an object to be used. Before the moral norm which prohibits the direct taking of the life of an innocent human being, there are no privileges or exceptions for anyone. It makes no difference whether one is the master of the world or the 'poorest of the poor' on the face of the earth. Before the demands of morality we are all absolutely equal." (*Evangelium Vitae*, (57), the "Gospel of Life", Pope John Paul II, 25 March 1995.)

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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