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INTERVENTO DELLA SANTA SEDE ALL'INCONTRO DEI LEADERS RELIGIOSI NELL'AMBITO DELLA SESSIONE SPECIALE DELL'ASSEMBLEA GENERALE DELL'O.N.U. SUI BAMBINI

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E' in corso a New York la Sessione Speciale dell'Assemblea Generale dell'O.N.U. sui bambini. Pubblichiamo di seguito l'intervento del Rappresentante della Santa Sede, Em.mo Card. Alfonso López Trujillo, all'Incontro dei Leaders Religiosi che si è svolto ieri nell'ambito dei lavori:

• INTERVENTO DEL CARD. ALFONSO LÓPEZ TRUJILLO

There are certain truths in the world to which everyone adheres and which continue to be validated through empirical data, such as mathematical facts and scientific certainties. These truths continue to direct learning and knowledge, unlocking even greater discoveries and secrets.

At the same time, there are certain universal truths regarding mankind and society that have been likewise recognized or established as unquestionable, which are the foundation of human rights declarations and international law and which have been enshrined in a document that for this reason bears the title the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights". What is striking is how in fact, this universality is afterwards not recognized. Thus in Article 3 of the Declaration, the defense of the right to life is affirmed, but then in various ways is rejected, especially regarding the crime of abortion.

In this dialogue involving religious leaders, it seems appropriate then to ask why those social truths, truths that are considered as real and concrete as any mathematical proof or scientific fact, appear to be so often ignored, questioned or challenged, especially within the work of the United Nations.

For example, the Charter of the United Nations states that, "*We the peoples of the United Nations determined .. to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small...*". The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in its first Article, proclaims, "*All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights...*". Yet too many delegations refuse to speak of this human dignity with which we have all been endowed and in which we all share. This truth, this fact is not only the very cornerstone of the human rights outlined by the United Nations, but the very cornerstone of

humanity itself. It is the recognition of our human dignity that helps bind us together and calls us to care and concern for each other. Why then is it ignored?

The Declaration on the Rights of the Child recognizes that, "... *the child by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth*" (Preamble) and "... *every child has the inherent right to life*", (Article 6). Yet, many delegations and governments refuse to recognize that fact; that right to life and the truth that life does indeed begin at the moment of conception. Delegations and governments refuse to affirm that every child has a right to protection and special care by the fact of the dignity with which he or she has been endowed by God, and that such protection is owed to the child before birth as well as after the child is born.

It is bewildering to think that many of those same delegations that refuse to recognize the human dignity of the unborn child claim to speak for the dignity of the oppressed, or those who suffer from discrimination. Such a selective, superficial or distorted recognition and understanding of human dignity is truly a denial of one of those social truths that should never be questioned or challenged.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights also declares that, "*The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.*" (Article 16) That same sentiment is found in the Preamble to the Declaration on the Rights of the Child, and has been repeated again and again in various United Nations Plans and Programs of Action. Still, it seems that in almost every debate in which the role of the family is discussed, this basic and recognized truth is challenged, and too many delegations attempt to change the understanding of the make-up and role of the family in society and in the life of the child.

Children have the right to live in a family, to be protected and provided for by loving and caring parents or guardians. Everyone understands the importance of the family and the role that parents play in the lives of children.

At the same time there is a denial of parents' rights, there is a denial of their religious or social background as well as their heritage. And in those sad times when the structure of the family and the role of parents have broken down, those same people who profess the best interests of the child too often abandon their responsibilities to provide a loving, secure and nurturing environment for children and, as a principle, these best interests of the child are not observed. Another basic truth is pushed aside in the name of progressive thinking; tradition is broken down and society begins to crumble.

Everyone has the right to access to education, yet we see a continued gap between rich and poor, and between the percentages of boys and girls who are allowed to attend school, and complete a course of education.

Everyone has the right to the highest attainable standard of health. Can the world say that its people have enjoyed that right? Too many people, far too many children die each day because they do not have access to the most basic of medicines or health care. Too many people suffer because they do not have clean water to drink or because they live in environments that are unsafe.

Everyone has the right to adequate shelter, yet too many children are homeless and too many people live in overcrowded homes in overcrowded cities. This hard-won right is another that is very often denied.

These are not purely religious issues but rather social issues. Nevertheless, it is the obligation of religion, which deals with the spiritual relationship that we have with God and with one another, to point out when and where the political and the secular arenas have strayed from their true path.

The purpose for the establishment of the United Nations Organization was clearly defined in its Charter. Over the course of fifty-six years, the United Nations has struggled with making that stated purpose a reality in the world. The principles set forth in the charter were more than simply ideals. They continue to guide the concrete actions of the international community towards making the world a better place for the children of today and

tomorrow.

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