

HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE



BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIEGE
PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLS

BOLLETTINO

SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

N. 0507

Martedì 15.10.2002

INTERVENTO DELLA SANTA SEDE AL TERZO COMITATO DELL'ASSEMBLEA GENERALE DELLE NAZIONI UNITE SUL TEMA DELLA PROMOZIONE E DELLA TUTELA DEI DIRITTI DEI BAMBINI

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Ieri, 14 ottobre, nel corso della LVII Sessione dell'Assemblea Generale dell'O.N.U., S.E. Mons. Renato R. Martino, Capo Delegazione della Santa Sede, ha preso la parola dinanzi al III Comitato sul tema: "Promozione e tutela dei diritti dei bambini". Riportiamo qui di seguito il testo dell'intervento:

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

Mr. Chairman,

This past July, during the celebration of the World Youth Day, in Toronto, Canada, hundreds of thousands of young people joined together to pray, discuss and share their experiences of life. His Holiness Pope John Paul II spoke to the young people, gathered from around the world:

"You are young, and the Pope is old, 82 or 83 years of life is not the same as 22 or 23. But the Pope still fully identifies with your hopes and aspirations. Although I have lived through much darkness, under harsh totalitarian regimes, I have seen enough evidence to be unshakably convinced that no difficulty, no fear is so great that it can completely suffocate *the hope that springs eternal in the hearts of the young*. You are our hope, the young are our hope...Do not let that hope die! Stake your lives on it!"¹

Pope John Paul II put into words the deep reaction that I and the members of the Holy See Delegation had in witnessing the Independence Celebration of East Timor, last May 19-20. In the midst of their joy, the people of that small nation also had a deep sense of pride and hope. So many of those sharing in the festivities, possibly the vast majority, were families with small children, young people and adolescents.

All those people who joined in the celebration, from the youngest to the oldest had seen and experienced so much over the past years: oppression, isolation, poverty and the terror of the rioting, looting and burning during September and October 1999. But through all that, with the help of many agencies, including those of the United

Nations, the nation continues to be rebuilt and the future seems brighter.

In its statement at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the Holy See called attention to the unfortunate situation in many places throughout the world: "Too many do not have access to basic social services, namely: clean water, safe sanitation, health care, education, shelter or security. Too many people are unemployed or underemployed. Too many children, especially girls, lack educational opportunities...Too many people suffer from the devastation of sickness and disease, particularly the effects of HIV/AIDS and malaria, which continue to leave such a devastating impact, especially in Africa and the Caribbean. Too many have little hope for a brighter future."²

The outcome document of the Special Session of the General Assembly on Children, *A world fit for children*, addressed the concerns that continue to call attention to the plight of children and young people. Its Declaration states, "We hereby call on all members of society to join us in a global movement that will help build a world fit for children through upholding our commitments to the following principles and objectives: Put children first; Eradicate poverty; Leave no child behind; Care for every child; Educate every child; Protect children from harm and exploitation; Protect children from war; Combat HIV/AIDS; Listen to children and ensure their participation; Protect the earth for children."³

The pledge to uphold the commitments of the Special Session on Children, of the Millennium Summit or of any other international agreement is easy to make. What is difficult, what takes time, energy and political will is the carrying out of that pledge; of changing words into actions.

Carrying out the mission of promoting and protecting the rights of children and caring for their spiritual and physical well-being has been the concern of various agencies of the Catholic Church, for centuries. One of those agencies, the Pontifical Society of the Holy Childhood has lead the way for more than 150 years. Without discrimination of race, culture or religion, members of the Missionary Childhood, including children and young people themselves, share their bread and faith, and have given aid to millions of children, providing food, clothing and health care, protection, security and education. The Association continues to finance and support some 4,000 projects for the neediest children of the world.

The Holy See Delegation at the Special Session on Children was led by the President of the Pontifical Council for the Family and was pleased to have the Secretary General of Holy Childhood as a member of its Delegation. They listened intently to the various interventions made during the plenary and pledged to use what they heard to help the Holy See in better meeting the needs of the world's children.

This sort of promise, the conversion of words to work may be the most important result of any international meeting. This is the continued pledge of the Holy See.

Mr. Chairman, we concentrate our attention to the *Reports* before us, and we add that information to the other reports, coming from other Committees, that may have an impact on the rights and well being of children. My Delegation continues to see that this is a world filled with hope and again recalls those words of Pope John Paul II, "[N]o fear is so great that it can completely suffocate the hope that springs eternal in the hearts of the young."⁴

Mr. Chairman, let this discussion help to remind the Family of Nations that the future of humanity rests upon the shoulders of today's children and young people. Let us pledge to lighten that burden by continuing to promote and protect their rights and provide them with what they need to enhance their well being.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

¹ Pope John Paul II, Homily during the Mass at the 17th World Youth Day, Toronto, Downsview Park, 28 July 2002
² Archbishop Renato R. Martino, Statement of the Holy See to the World Summit on Sustainable

Development, Johannesburg, South Africa, 2 September 20023 A world fit for children, The Special Session of the General Assembly on Children, 10 May 2002, Paragraph 74 Pope John Paul II, World Youth Day, Toronto, 28 July 2002[01578-02.02] [Original text: English]
