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SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

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INTERVENTO DELLA SANTA SEDE PRESSO L'UFFICIO DELLE NAZIONI UNITE A GINEVRA SULLA LIBERTÀ RELIGIOSA

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Riportiamo di seguito l'intervento che S.E. Mons. Silvano M. Tomasi, Nunzio Apostolico e Osservatore Permanente della Santa Sede presso l'Ufficio delle Nazioni Unite a Ginevra, ha pronunciato il 22 marzo scorso sul Rispetto delle religioni e della libertà religiosa, in occasione della quarta Sessione ordinaria del Consiglio dei Diritti dell'Uomo:

• INTERVENTO DI S.E. MONS. SILVANO M. TOMASI

Mr. President,

1. The notable increase of interest in religion for its impact on the lives of individuals and of societies around the world is a phenomenon that finds -rightly so – an echo also in the Human Rights Council. Abuse of rights of believers, even outright violence against them, State restrictions, undue impositions and persecution, public insult to religious feelings, unfortunately persist and call for remedy. The Delegation of the Holy See appreciates and fully supports the openness of the new Council to uphold a universal vision of human rights protection. A major contribution of the Council is an approach that is inclusive and consistent with existing provisions in human rights instruments and declarations that clearly support, among other rights, freedom of religion, of expression, of conscience, of worship in private and in public, and respect of religious convictions for believers of all faiths and for non-believers alike.

2. The Holy See Delegation observes with preoccupation the emergence of an apparent dilemma between respect due to religions and the right to religious freedom as if they were incompatible and mutually exclusive aspects. On the contrary, they are complementary values that cannot stand one without the other.

The religious dimension of the human person, his attitude before transcendence and the consequent ethical demands, make up a concrete and fundamental manifestation of his or her capacity of free auto-determination. It is a basic reference point of personal and social behaviour. Religions can offer, and in fact do offer, a solid foundation for the defence of the values of personal and social justice, for respect of others and of nature.

3. In the course of history, there have been sad episodes of religious fanaticism with tragic social results. Yet religions are among those social factors that, together with science, have more contributed to the progress of humanity through the promotion of cultural, artistic, social and humanitarian values. Therefore any religion that preaches or condones violence, intolerance and hatred renders itself unworthy of the name. On the other hand, we cannot avoid noticing that besides pseudo-religious fanaticism there is evidence on occasions of a certain antireligious fanaticism that denigrates religion or, generally, the faithful of a religion, by attributing them responsibility of violent actions done today or in the past by some members of that religion. The legitimate criticism of certain forms of behaviour of followers of a religion should not turn into insult or unjust defamation nor into offensive mockery of its revered persons, practices, rites or symbols. Respect of the rights and dignity of others should mark the limit of any right, even that of the free expression and manifestation of one's opinions, religious ones included.

4. Respect for the human person and his or her dignity implies respect of his freedom in religious matters to profess, practice and publicly manifest one's religion without being mocked, injured, discriminated against. Respect of religion means respect of those who have chosen to follow it and practice it in a free and pacific way, in private and in public, individually or collectively. Offence to a religion, especially when it is that of a minority, brings about some coercion against its followers that will make it more difficult to profess, practice and manifest this religion in public.

5. The subject of religion and the subject of freedom is always the human person, whose dignity is at the origin of fundamental rights. The respect of any religion is based in the end on the respect that is due to all those who, in the exercise of their freedom, follow and practice it. Of course, such respect cannot imply contempt or attacks on the rights of people who do not follow the same religion or follow other convictions. In this way, the issue of respect due to religions should find its explicit foundation in the rights of religious freedom and freedom of expression. Consequently, the promotion of respect for the rights of freedom of religion and freedom of expression should not leave aside the respect of concrete religions, beliefs and opinions in which such rights are realized. One cannot consider the ridicule of the sacred as a right of freedom. In the full respect of the right of expression, mechanisms or instruments need to be developed, coherent with the human rights provisions that would defend the message of religious communities from manipulation and would avoid a disrespectful presentation of their members.

Mr. President,

6. In conclusion, a really democratic state values religious freedom as a fundamental element of the common good, worthy of respect and protection, and creates the conditions that allow its citizens to live and act freely. If the discussion focuses only on religious tolerance and defamation of religion, it limits the range of rights and the contribution that religions offer. In fact, the impression could develop that religion is tolerated on the base of cultural, ethnic, political circumstances, that could change or even turn into forms of coercion, and is not recognized as a fundamental human right inherent in every human person. A comprehensive approach, that sees respect of religion rooted in the freedom that every human person is entitled to enjoy in a balance of rights with others and with society, appears as the reasonable way forward.

Thank you, Mr. President

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