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STATEMENT OF THE HOLY SEE AT THE 64th SESSION OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY BEFORE THE SECOND COMMITTEE, ON ITEM 57: ERADICATION OF POVERTY AND OTHER DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

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Here below the statement delivered by H.E. Archbishop Celestino Migliore, Apostolic Nuncio, Permanent Observer of the Holy See, on 22 October 2009 at the 64th Session of the UN General Assembly before the Second Committee, on item 57: Eradication of poverty and other development issues:

Mr. Chairman,

The topic of poverty eradication will continue to be present in the deliberations of the General Assembly as long as human limitations and changing historical circumstances give way to shortcomings, social imbalances and injustices. However, by addressing today once again this item, we renew our commitment to eradicating the main structural causes of poverty.

These days some governments, intergovernmental agencies, academics and other experts are predicting the end of the economic downturn caused by the financial crisis of 2008 and the beginning of recovery in major world economies. Nevertheless, even the most optimistic outlook admits that recovery will be very slow, and there is no guarantee that there will not be any further shocks and setbacks, including those triggered by inappropriate use of measures adopted to curb the effects of the crisis.

Between the potential for recovery and continued setbacks lie some discouraging statistics on the deterioration of public health, social welfare systems and education as well as a widespread sense of social disintegration. All this is difficult to measure, but is clearly discernible in daily life. In the case of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), where a remarkable growth was experienced over the last decade, the new world situation does not seem to offer much hope.

The real crisis, therefore, is not the disruption of the international economic structures based largely on weak or even fictitious bases, but the sharp worsening of poverty in a world already haunted by intolerable misery.

In addition, those who bear the brunt of the crisis are only marginally mentioned in public discourse despite the fact that their numbers have skyrocketed and opportunities to reintegrate in the eventual economic growth are rather scarce or even non-existent. Several monitoring and advisory agencies have announced that the unemployment rate in industrialized countries has increased over the past 12 months to levels comparable to those in the 1930s and malnutrition rates have increased by 11%, primarily in developing countries. Even if an economic recovery is imminent, for those who remain jobless the crisis is not over and its social and human costs persist.

In this context, it does not seem enough simply to re-launch the global economy and establish some new rules and controls to ensure a less uncertain and traumatic financial sector. It is necessary today more than ever to work towards a qualitative change in the management of international affairs.

Resolution 63/230 notes with concern the decline of official development assistance in the years preceding the outbreak of the crisis, especially in 2006 and 2007. The year 2008 and the first half of 2009 have even seen an acceleration of this trend, apparently justified by a desire to use all available funds to prevent a further financial collapse. Many voices have been raised, however, against such an unfounded argument. In point of fact, the amount necessary to fulfill official development assistance commitments is drastically smaller than that allocated to restore the global financial sector. To delay the necessary developmental assistance reaffirms the moral roots of the crisis – the lack of solidarity and responsibility for long-term effects of economic measures. As was mentioned by my delegation on several occasions, only a constant and sustained investment in all women and men will ensure the minimum economic and political stability needed for the universal common good.

It is therefore necessary to seek the implementation of international political commitments without delay and without excuses. The already launched sale of a portion of the gold reserves of international financial institutions to help the poorest and most indebted countries, as well as the commitment to support poor countries made during the 2005 G8 meeting in Gleneagles and March 2009 G20 summit in London, should not remain mere declarations to be considered after the resolution of the crisis, but need to be implemented and enhanced as urgent steps towards a complete and lasting solution.

The various social commitments taken at the Copenhagen Conference on Social Development (1995) and the General Conference of the International Labor Organization, especially those related to decent work (1999-2000) are essential for a far-reaching action and solution in favor of a balanced and sustained world economic recovery. In addition, international trade agreements and financial statements must always and in every situation ensure sufficient political and economic space to the member states to fulfill their own responsibilities, especially those of human development of the poor, promotion of social integration and the establishment and strengthening of social security networks.

My delegation looks with attention and interest at the proposed topic "Legal Empowerment of the Poor". In fact, the implementation of a national and international economic system that actually serves the interests of the poor requires that they be able to defend and promote their own rights in the context of the rule of law at the national and international levels. But this is not enough; we must promote a true human empowerment of the poor and provide, even in conditions of economic crisis, greater access to education. This needs to go beyond basic education or professional training, both important causes of development, and concern the total formation of the person.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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