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Statement of the Holy See to the U.N. in New York at the General Debate of the UNGA First Committee (New York, 14 October 2014)

Here below the Statement by H.E. Archbishop Bernardito Auza, Apostolic Nuncio, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations at the General Debate of the UNGA First Committee (New York, 14 October 2014):

Statement by H.E. Archbishop Bernardito Auza

Mr. Chairman,

As this is the first time that I address this Committee, allow me to assure you and the bureau of my delegation's full cooperation in the pursuit of the Committee's vitally important efforts for world peace.

I have the honor to convey to you and to all the delegations the greetings of His Holiness Pope Francis, who has made clear his strong support for the rapid adoption of steps that would lead to the elimination of weapons of mass destruction and to the reduction of the world's reliance on armed force in the conduct of international affairs. He pleads for the non-proliferation of arms and for the disarmament of all parties, beginning with nuclear and chemical weapons disarmament.

The past year has seen progress on the elimination of chemical weapons; yet reports of the continued use of chemical weapons, including chlorine gas, reminds the international community to redouble its efforts to eliminate once and for all chemical weapons and any use as a weapon of dual-use chemicals.

With regard to nuclear weapons, the third conference on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons, which will be held in December in Vienna, Austria, is a sobering reminder of the deep frustration of the international community at the lack of speedy progress on nuclear disarmament, and of the inhuman and immoral consequences of the use of weapons of mass destruction. The inability of the nuclear-weapon states to begin negotiations toward further reductions in their existing stockpiles is troubling, but the "modernization" of some existing systems and the increase of weapons stockpiles are even more troubling.

Mr. Chairman,

The ninth NPT Review Conference will take place very soon in New York. Nearly all the States represented in this room are parties to the NPT. One would think that a Treaty so important to our mutual security would be implemented more rapidly and effectively, and that by now decisions taken at previous review conferences would already be advanced in their implementation. Regrettably, this has not been and is not the case.

The NPT's central promise of nuclear weapons States to gradually disarm in exchange for non-nuclear-weapon States to refrain from acquiring nuclear arms remains at an impasse. The Holy See continues to believe that a policy of permanent nuclear deterrence jeopardizes the process of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. My delegation, therefore, urges this Committee and the preparation for the ninth NPT Review Conference to focus on the need to move beyond nuclear deterrence, and work toward the establishment of lasting peace founded on mutual trust, rather than a state of mere non-belligerence founded on the logic of mutual destruction.

In this regard, the Holy See urges all states to sign and/or ratify the CTBT without further delay, because it is a core element of the international nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime.

Moreover, my delegation believes that the establishment of weapons of mass destruction free zones would be a big step in the right direction, as it would demonstrate we can indeed move toward a universal agreement to eliminate all weapons of mass destruction.

Mr. Chairman,

In keeping our focus on nuclear weapons and the strengthening of the NPT, we should not neglect our larger objective of a world less reliant on the use of force. Article VI of the NPT clearly states that "Each of the Parties to the Treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures related to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control."

The Holy See welcomes the progress, however modest, in the areas of conventional weapons, like those related to the implementation of the Ottawa Convention and of the Cluster Munitions Convention. But it remains deeply concerned that the flow of conventional arms continues to exacerbate conflicts around the globe. And let us not forget that financial greed fuels arms sales, and arms sales fuel conflicts that cause untold sufferings and violations of human rights. For as long as so great a quantity of arms are in circulation as at present, new pretexts can always be found for initiating hostilities, and easy access to arms facilitates the perpetration of violence against innocent populations.

It is my delegation's sincerest hope that this year's session will respond to this challenge, and recognize the grave consequences of the proliferation and use of conventional weapons on human life throughout the world.

While aware that the work of this Committee is extremely challenging and agreements are hard to come by, we must never despair. May the proverbial image of the constant drops of water ever patiently melting the hardest rock inspire us all to go forward in the midst of slow progress and in spite of stalemates and setbacks.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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