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Statement of the Holy See to the U.N. at the Security Council Open Debate on “Women Peace Security” (15 April 2015)

Here below the Statement by H.E. Archbishop Bernardito Auza, Apostolic Nuncio, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations at the Security Council Open Debate on “Women Peace Security” (New York, 15 April 2015):

Statement by H.E. Archbishop Bernardito Auza

Madam President,

My delegation wishes to express its gratitude for Jordan’s Presidency of the Security Council this month, and for the Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict. We would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his report on conflict-related sexual violence, and commend the work of civil society representatives on this issue.

Women are not spared any of the brutal consequences of war, and are additionally subject to uniquely degrading and traumatizing attacks and long-term consequences. It is only just and reasonable that their voice should be present and influential in the work of preventing and resolving violence and war.

Madam President,

It is well documented that sexual violence of many kinds accompanies modern warfare. We all know the awful litany: women are raped and trafficked, forced into prostitution to earn a living, terrorized individually and in their roles as protectors of their children and other vulnerable family members. All violence against human life is terrible, but sexual violence is designed to debase, dehumanize, demoralize – in a unique way. The consequences are profound and long lasting – physical as well as psychological. The hatred and humiliation these crimes can provoke are deep, and surely impede in powerful ways the goals of peace and security – for which this institution was created.

The recent year has been marked by new and ongoing atrocities involving sexual violence in various conflicts

and by groups such as Boko Haram and the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS). Some are also attacks upon women and girls purely because of the faith they profess. Although this is of very serious concern today for Christians, surely this is a matter where our shared human nature, across all religions and cultures, cries out for common commitment of members of all faiths and governments, strongly to condemn and confront such heinous acts, and to step forward to protect those threatened.

It seems that, in the past several years, there has emerged a greater international consciousness of the scourge of human trafficking, and even increased responses. It is to be hoped that there will be an ever greater appreciation of what Pope Francis has called the “trauma”, affecting both “body [and] spirit,” of rape as a tool of war. To adapt an observation made by His Holiness, a two point drop in the stock market is front page news, while the violation of hundreds or even thousands of women would go unreported.

Madam President,

My delegation supports those processes identified in successive reports issued by the Secretary General, as essential for ensuring justice to women assaulted in conflict: effective investigation and documentation; consistent and rigorous prosecution; and ongoing investigation and responsibility regarding the root causes of sexual and other violence in armed conflict. We support efforts to bring adequate legal, medical and social services to the particular women affected, to witnesses and survivors, and to their family members. Because of the Catholic Church’s permanent local presence in the areas of the world most affected by disasters, a network of Catholic institutions and agencies respond rapidly and effectively to address the consequence of violence in armed conflict.

It is always distressing, however, to see that some are still promoting the abortion of unborn children as part of the “treatment” or response to the attack of their mothers. This contradicts the peace and security mission of the United Nations, and proposes to meet violence with more violence.

Madam President,

It has been observed many times at this body, and it is true, that women are not only victims but also necessary agents and contributors in the work of preventing and resolving conflicts. Without their contributions, government, negotiators and civil society groups can neither understand the problems, nor propose effective solutions. Moreover, it is important to continue in every Member State the steady and patient work of achieving structural justice for women in every sector of society. A proper vision of women’s roles in society, and an integration of women in every social sector, are crucial aspects of violence prevention.

Thank you, Madam President.

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