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Statement of the Holy See to the United Nations at the Security Council Open Debate on “The role of youth in countering violent extremism and promoting peace” (New York, 23 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 “The role of youth in countering violent extremism and promoting peace” (New York, 23 April 2015):

Statement by H.E. Archbishop Bernardito Auza

Your Royal Highness,

At the outset, let me congratulate Jordan for its Presidency during this month and, in particular, for scheduling this debate on the role of young people in countering violent extremism and promoting peace.

The ever-increasing globalization and technological interconnectedness have brought many benefits to our world today, but they have also created new and emerging challenges. Young people around the world can use the internet and social media to enter into contact, make friends and learn about the great cultures and traditions of other people in every corner of the world. Unfortunately, these great technological advances can also be manipulated to spread messages of hate and violence. Today’s debate allows us to examine more in depth how these harmful messages are finding new audiences and how States can work together to face the challenge.

The phenomenon of young people’s responding to the recruitment of those inciting them to engage in violent extremism develops within a context of disillusionment and missed opportunities, of socio-cultural identity crisis and failed integration, of alienation and dissatisfaction, of intergenerational break-up and broken families.

A fundamental step in addressing the radicalization of young people is to work with and support the family in its efforts to educate children and young people in the values of dialogue and respect for others, to make them better equipped to resist what appear at first as attractive calls to a “higher cause” and to “adventure” with extremist groups. The family is the first educator of children. If States really want to reach young people before they are exposed to extremist ideologies, they should “render appropriate assistance to parents...in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities.”¹

Studies and events show that some governments tend to avoid frank and constructive conversations on the question of radicalization. Hiding the problem, however, is counterproductive. Fostering public debate, on the other hand, can encourage young people to ventilate their frustrations before they succumb to extremist ideologies, and can assist the State to articulate policies accordingly. Failure to bring the problem into public discussion may imply disinterest, fear or both, while encouraging debate will ordinarily promote collective confidence and deeper mutual knowledge among the various ethnic or racial, and religious components of society. This dialogue can lead to the formulation of government policies of which all members of the society can claim collective ownership, and offer young people convincing counter-narratives to extremist propaganda.

Indeed, balanced public policy plays a key role in facilitating a solid integration of immigrants in society as citizens. Policies that discourage xenophobic or racist perceptions are much needed, and contribute to the observance of healthy religious and socio-cultural values.

Religion constitutes a potent part of these value systems. Policies and education that seek to minimize or eliminate the faith component of individual and collective identities could leave the young disoriented, alienated, marginalized or excluded, and prone to the message of extremist groups. There is no doubt that the catchwords and slogans used by extremist groups to recruit young people often involve distorted religious and socio-cultural values.

Unemployment and despair also lie behind the vulnerability of many young people towards the propaganda and manipulations of extremist recruiters. Idle minds and hands are highly vulnerable to extreme ideologies. Thus, global economic inequalities and the marginalization and exclusion from development to which they lead are not only a grave social and economic concern, but can become a threat to international peace and security. Thus, achieving social justice is key to counter the phenomenon of young people's joining extremist organizations.

Your Royal Highness,

In our fight against extremist ideologies and in our efforts to promote a culture of peace, young people themselves are a most precious resource. We can counter extremist recruiters by promoting voices that are trusted and respected among their peers, in the very platforms they use to recruit new members, like the social media.

Faith leaders and organizations must condemn messages of hate in the name of religion and provide young people with the religious formation that fosters understanding and respect between peoples of different faiths. People of faith have a grave responsibility to condemn those who seek to detach faith from reason and to instrumentalize faith as a justification for violence. As Pope Francis emphasized during his visit to Albania on 21 September 2014, no one should consider oneself *"to be the 'armour' of God while planning and carrying out acts of violence and oppression!"*

Thank you, Your Royal Highness.

1 Convention on the Rights of the Child, article 18.2

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