



HOLY SEE

Check against delivery

**Address of His Eminence
Cardinal PIETRO PAROLIN
Secretary of State of His Holiness Pope Francis**

69th Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations

New York, Monday 29 September 2014

Mr President,

In extending to you the Holy See's congratulations on your election to the presidency of the sixty-ninth Session of the General Assembly, I wish to convey the cordial greetings of His Holiness Pope Francis to you and to all the participating delegations. He assures you of his closeness and prayers for the work of this session of the General Assembly, with the hope that it will be carried out in an atmosphere of productive collaboration, working for a more fraternal and united world by identifying ways to resolve the serious problems which beset the whole human family today.

In continuity with his predecessors, Pope Francis recently reiterated the Holy See's esteem and appreciation for the United Nations as an indispensable means of building an authentic family of peoples. The Holy See values the efforts of this distinguished institution "to ensure world peace, respect for human dignity, the protection of persons, especially the poorest and most vulnerable, and harmonious economic and social development" (*Address to the Secretary General of the United Nations and the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination*, 9 May 2014). Along these lines and on numerous occasions, His Holiness has encouraged men and women of good will to place their talents effectively at the service of all by working together, in tandem with the political community and each sector of civil society (cf. *Letter to the World Economic Forum*, 17 January 2014).

Though mindful of the human person's gifts and abilities, Pope Francis observes that today there is the danger of widespread indifference. As much as this indifference concerns the field of politics, it also affects economic and social sectors, "since an important part of humanity does not share in the benefits of progress and is in fact relegated to the status of second-class citizens" (*Address of Pope Francis to the Secretary General of the United Nations and the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination*, 9 May 2014). At times, such apathy is synonymous with irresponsibility. This is the case today, when a union of States, which was created with the fundamental goal of saving generations from the horror of war that brings untold sorrow to humanity (cf. *Preamble of the Charter of the United Nations*, 1), remains passive in the face of hostilities suffered by defenceless populations.

I recall the words of His Holiness addressed to the Secretary General at the beginning of August: "It is with a heavy and anguished heart that I have been following the dramatic events in northern Iraq", thinking of "the tears, the suffering and the heartfelt cries of despair of Christians and other religious minorities of [that] beloved land". In that same letter the Pope renewed his urgent appeal to the international community to "take action to end the humanitarian tragedy now underway". He further encouraged "all the competent organs of the United Nations, in particular those responsible for security, peace, humanitarian law and assistance to refugees, to continue their efforts in accordance with the Preamble and relevant Articles of the United Nations Charter" (*Letter of the Holy Father to the Secretary General of the United Nations Organization concerning the situation in Northern Iraq*, 9 August 2014).

Today I am compelled to repeat the heartfelt appeal of His Holiness and to propose to the General Assembly, as well as to the other competent organs of the United Nations, that this body deepen its understanding of the difficult and complex moment that we are now living.

With the dramatic situation in northern Iraq and some parts of Syria, we are seeing a totally new phenomenon: the existence of a terrorist organization which threatens all States, vowing to dissolve them and to replace them with a pseudo-religious world government. Unfortunately, as the Holy Father recently said, even today there are those who would presume to wield power by coercing consciences and taking lives, persecuting and murdering in the name of God (cf. *L'Osservatore Romano*, 3 May 2014). These actions bring injury to entire ethnic groups, populations and ancient cultures. It must be remembered that such violence is born out of a disregard for God and falsifies “religion itself, since religion aims instead at reconciling men and women with God, at illuminating and purifying consciences, and at making it clear that each human being is the image of the Creator” (BENEDICT XVI, *Address to the Members of the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See*, 7 January 2013).

In a world of global communications, this new phenomenon has found followers in numerous places, and has succeeded in attracting from around the world young people who are often disillusioned by a widespread indifference and a dearth of values in wealthier societies. This challenge, in all its tragic aspects, should compel the international community to promote a unified response, based on solid juridical criteria and a collective willingness to cooperate for the common good. To this end, the Holy See considers it useful to focus attention on two major areas. The first is to address the cultural and political origins of contemporary challenges, acknowledging the need for innovative strategies to confront these international problems in which cultural factors play a fundamental role. The second area for consideration is a further study of the effectiveness of international law today, namely its successful implementation by those mechanisms used by the United Nations to prevent war, stop aggressors, protect populations and help victims.

Following the attacks of 11 September 2001, when the world woke up to the reality of a new form of terrorism, some media and “think tanks” oversimplified that tragic moment by interpreting all subsequent and problematic situations in terms of a clash of civilizations. This view ignored longstanding and profound experiences of good relations between cultures, ethnic groups and religions, and interpreted through this lens other complex situations such as the Middle Eastern question and those civil conflicts presently occurring elsewhere. Likewise, there have been attempts to find so-called legal remedies to counter and prevent the surge of this new form of terrorism. At times, unilateral solutions have been favoured over those grounded in international law. The methods adopted, likewise, have not always respected the established order or particular cultural circumstances of peoples who often found themselves unwillingly at the centre of this new form of global conflict. These mistakes, and the fact that they were at least tacitly approved, should lead us to a serious and profound examination of conscience. The challenges that these new forms of terrorism pose should not make us succumb to exaggerated views and cultural extrapolations. The reductionism of interpreting situations in terms of a clash of civilizations, playing on existing fears and prejudices, only leads to reactions of a xenophobic nature that, paradoxically, then serve to reinforce the very sentiments at the heart of terrorism itself. The challenges we face ought to spur a renewed call for religious and intercultural dialogue and for new developments in international law, to promote just and courageous peace initiatives.

What, then, are the paths open to us? First and foremost, there is the path of promoting dialogue and understanding among cultures which is already implicitly contained in the Preamble and First Article of the Charter of the United Nations. This path must become an ever more explicit objective of the international community and of governments if we are truly committed to peace in

the world. At the same time we must recall that it is not the role of international organizations or states to invent culture, nor is it possible to do so. Similarly, it is not the place of governments to establish themselves as spokespersons of cultures, nor are they the primary actors responsible for cultural and interreligious dialogue. The natural growth and enrichment of culture is, instead, the fruit of all components of civil society working together. International organizations and states *do* have the task of promoting and supporting, in a decisive way, and with the necessary financial means, those initiatives and movements which promote dialogue and understanding among cultures, religions and peoples. Peace, after all, is not the fruit of a balance of powers, but rather the result of justice at every level, and most importantly, the shared responsibility of individuals, civil institutions and governments. In effect, this means understanding one other and valuing the other's culture and circumstances. It also entails having concern for each other by sharing spiritual and cultural patrimonies and offering opportunities for human enrichment.

And yet, we do not face the challenges of terrorism and violence with cultural openness alone. The important path of international law is also available to us. The situation today requires a more incisive understanding of this law, giving particular attention to the "responsibility to protect". In fact, one of the characteristics of the recent terrorist phenomenon is that it disregards the existence of the state and, in fact, the entire international order. Terrorism aims not only to bring change to governments, to damage economic structures or simply to commit common crimes. It seeks to directly control areas within one or various states, to impose its own laws, which are distinct and opposed to those of the sovereign State. It also undermines and rejects all existing juridical systems, attempting to impose dominion over consciences and complete control over persons.

The global nature of this phenomenon, which knows no borders, is precisely why the framework of international law offers the only viable way of dealing with this urgent challenge. This reality requires a renewed United Nations that undertakes to foster and preserve peace. At present, the active and passive participants of such a system are all the states, which place themselves under the authority of the Security Council and who are committed not to engage in acts of war without the approval of the same Council. Within this framework, military action carried out by one state in response to another state is possible only in the event of self-defence when under direct armed attack and only up until such time as the Security Council successfully takes the necessary steps to restore international peace and security (cf. *Charter of the United Nations*, Art. 51). New forms of terrorism engage in military actions on a vast scale. They are not able to be contained by any one state and explicitly intend to wage war against the international Community. In this sense we are dealing with criminal behaviour that is not envisaged by the juridical configuration of the United Nations Charter. This notwithstanding, it must be recognized that the norms in place for the prevention of war and the intervention of the Security Council are equally applicable, on varying grounds, in the case of a war provoked by a "non-State actor".

In the first place, this is because the fundamental objective of the Charter is to avoid the scourge of war for future generations. The juridical structure of the Security Council, for all its limits and defects, was established for this very reason. Moreover, Article 39 of the Charter of the United Nations assigns the Security Council the task of determining threats or aggressions to international peace, without specifying the type of actors carrying out the threats or aggressions. Finally, the states themselves, by virtue of membership to the UN, have renounced any use of force which is inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations (cf. *Charter of the United Nations*, Art.2, 4).

Given that the new forms of terrorism are “transnational”, they no longer fall under the competence of the security forces of any one state: the territories of several states are involved. Thus the combined forces of a number of nations will be required to guarantee the defence of unarmed citizens. Since there is no juridical norm which justifies unilateral policing actions beyond one’s own borders, there is no doubt that the area of competence lies with the Security Council. This is because, without the consent and supervision of the state in which the use of force is exercised, such force would result in regional or international instability, and therefore enter within the scenarios foreseen by the Charter of the United Nations.

My Delegation wishes to recall that it is both licit and urgent to stop aggression through multilateral action and a proportionate use of force. As a representative body of a worldwide religious community embracing different nations, cultures and ethnicities, the Holy See earnestly hopes that the international community will assume responsibility in considering the best means to stop all aggression and avoid the perpetration of new and even graver injustices. The present situation, therefore, though indeed quite serious, is an occasion for the member states of the United Nations Organization to honour the very spirit of the Charter of the United Nations by speaking out on the tragic conflicts which are tearing apart entire peoples and nations. It is disappointing, that up to now, the international community has been characterized by contradictory voices and even by silence with regard to the conflicts in Syria, the Middle East and Ukraine. It is paramount that there be a unity of action for the common good, avoiding the cross-fire of vetoes. As His Holiness wrote to the Secretary General on 9 August last, “the most basic understanding of human dignity compels the international community, particularly through the norms and mechanisms of international law, to do all that it can to stop and to prevent further systematic violence against ethnic and religious minorities”.

While the concept of “the responsibility to protect” is implicit in the constitutional principles of the Charter of the United Nations and of Humanitarian Law, it does not specifically favour a recourse to arms. It asserts, rather, the responsibility of the entire international community, in a spirit of solidarity, to confront heinous crimes such as genocide, ethnic cleansing and religiously motivated persecution. Here with you today, I cannot fail to mention the many Christians and ethnic minorities who in recent months have endured atrocious persecution and suffering in Iraq and Syria. Their blood demands of us all an unwavering commitment to respect and promote the dignity of every single person as willed and created by God. This means also respect for religious freedom, which the Holy See considers a fundamental right, since no one can be forced “to act against his or her conscience”, and everyone “has the duty and consequently the right to seek the truth in religious matters” (Second Vatican Council, *Dignitatis Humanae*, 3).

In summary, the promotion of a culture of peace calls for renewed efforts in favour of dialogue, cultural appreciation and cooperation, while respecting the variety of sensibilities. What is needed is a far-sighted political approach that does not rigidly impose *a priori* political models which undervalue the sensibilities of individual peoples. Ultimately, there must be a genuine willingness to apply thoroughly the current mechanisms of law, while at the same time remaining open to the implications of this crucial moment. This will ensure a multilateral approach that will better serve human dignity, and protect and advance integral human development throughout the world. Such a willingness, when concretely expressed in new juridical formulations, will certainly bring fresh vitality to the United Nations. It will also help resolve serious conflicts, be they active or dormant, which still affect some parts of Europe, Africa and Asia, and whose ultimate resolution requires the commitment of all.

Mr President,

With Resolution A/68/6 of the 68th Session of the General Assembly, it was decided that this present Session would discuss the Post-2015 Development Agenda, to be then formally adopted in the 70th Session in September 2015. You yourself, Mr President, aptly chose the main theme of this present Session: *Delivering and Implementing a Transformative Post-2015 Development Agenda*.

During your recent meeting with all the Chief Executives of Agencies, Funds and Programs of the United Nations (cf. *Address to the Secretary General of the United Nations and the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination*, 9 May 2014), His Holiness requested that future objectives for sustainable development be formulated “with generosity and courage, so that they can have a real impact on the structural causes of poverty and hunger, attain more substantial results in protecting the environment, ensure dignified and productive labour for all, and provide an appropriate protection for the family, which is an essential element in sustainable human and social development. Specifically, this involves challenging all forms of injustice and resisting the ‘economy of exclusion’, the ‘throwaway culture’ and the ‘culture of death’”. Pope Francis encouraged the Chief Executives to promote “a true, worldwide ethical mobilization which, beyond all differences of religious or political convictions, will spread and put into practice a shared ideal of fraternity and solidarity, especially with regard to the poorest and those most excluded” (*ibid*).

In this regard, the Holy See welcomes the 17 “Sustainable Development Goals” proposed by the Working Group (*Open Working Group for Sustainable Goals*), which seek to address the structural causes of poverty by promoting dignified labour for everyone. Equally, the Holy See appreciates that the *goals* and *targets*, for most part, do not echo wealthy populations’ fears regarding population growth in poorer countries. It also welcomes the fact that the goals and targets do not impose on poorer states lifestyles which are typically associated with advanced economies and which tend to show a disregard for human dignity. Furthermore, with regard to the *Post-2015 Development Agenda*, the incorporation of the results of the OWG [*Open Working Group for Sustainable Goals*], alongside the indications given in the *Report of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing* and those arising out of the interagency consultation, would seem indispensable for the realization of the *Sustainable Development Goals* and the *Post-2015 Development Agenda*.

Nevertheless, and notwithstanding the efforts of the United Nations and of many people of good will, the number of the poor and excluded is increasing not only in developing nations but also in developed ones. The “Responsibility to protect”, as stated earlier, refers to extreme aggressions against human rights, cases of serious contempt of humanitarian law or grave natural catastrophes. In a similar way there is a need to make legal provision for protecting people against other forms of aggression, which are less evident but just as serious and real. For example, a financial system governed only by speculation and the maximization of profits, or one in which individual persons are regarded as disposable items in a culture of waste, could be tantamount, in certain circumstances, to an offence against human dignity. It follows, therefore, that the UN and its member states have an urgent and grave responsibility for the poor and excluded, mindful always that social and economic justice is an essential condition for peace.

Mr President,

Each day of the 69th Session of the General Assembly, and indeed of the next four Sessions, up until November 2018, will bear the sad and painful memory of the futile and inhumane tragedy of the First World War (*a senseless slaughter*, as Pope Benedict XV referred to it), with its millions of victims and untold destruction. Marking the centenary of the start of the conflict, His Holiness Pope Francis expressed his desire that “the mistakes of the past are not repeated, that the lessons of history are acknowledged, and that the causes for peace may always prevail through patient and courageous dialogue” (*Angelus*, 27 July 2014). On that occasion, the thoughts of His Holiness focused particularly on three areas of crisis: the Middle East, Iraq and Ukraine. He urged all Christians and people of faith to pray to the Lord to “grant to these peoples and to the Leaders of those regions the wisdom and strength needed to move forward with determination on the path toward peace, to address every dispute with the tenacity of dialogue and negotiation and with the power of reconciliation. May the common good and respect for every person, rather than specific interests, be at the centre of every decision. Let us remember that in war all is lost and in peace nothing” (*ibid*).

Mr President,

In making my own the sentiments of the Holy Father, I fervently hope that they may be shared by all present here. I offer to each of you my best wishes for your work, while trusting that this Session will spare no effort to put to an end the clamour of weapons that marks existing conflicts and that it will continue to foster the development of the entire human race, and in particular, the poorest among us.

Thank you, Mr President.