

Statement by the Holy See at the Open Debate of the United Nations Security Council

Monsignor Urbańczyk (Holy See): My delegation wishes to congratulate Chile on its presidency of the Security Council and for convening this important debate. Today's discussion provides a much-needed opportunity to focus on the impact of violence on women and girls in conflict settings and to identify the initiatives that must be undertaken to eradicate this scourge that continues to escalate.

The Holy See firmly opposes recourse to armed conflict as a means of solving disputes and recognizes that women and girls suffer disproportionately from the ravages of conflict. In conflict settings women and girls are more vulnerable as a result of inequality and are directly targeted as part of fear tactics and deliberate assaults on their rights.

The belief in the sanctity of human life and the inherent dignity of the human person is the foundation of the principles of Catholic social teaching. All persons, women and men, girls and boys, by virtue of their human dignity are free and equal. Violence in all its forms is an affront to human dignity and, moreover, sexual violence against women tears at the very fabric of society.

That was pointed out by His Holiness Pope Francis when he emphasized that we must not overlook the fact that wars involve another horrendous crime, the crime of rape. That is a most grave offence against the dignity of women, who are not only violated in body but also in spirit, resulting in a trauma hard to erase and with effects on society as well. Sadly, even apart from situations of war, even today all too many women are victims of violence.

My delegation remains concerned about the continued lack of attention and priority to the protection of women and girls who are targeted and attacked purely because of the faith they profess. The lack of focus and priority for protecting them is troubling when Christians face extinction in some regions of the world and in other regions Christian schools for girls are targeted and attacked. That is a shared reality of members of all faiths, and therefore requires the shared commitment of members of all faiths and Governments strongly to condemn and confront such violence.

The Catholic Church, through its institutions and agencies throughout the world, is providing assistance, care and support to thousands of survivors of sexual violence in situations of armed conflict. Those institutions and their courageous individuals sacrifice themselves on a daily basis, and many of them have paid dearly for their endeavours. Because of that permanent local presence in the world's most disaster-prone areas, this network of Catholic institutions and agencies responds rapidly and effectively to address the consequences of violence in armed conflict.

In conclusion, as Pope Francis recently noted in his address to the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See, we must reject the culture of enslavement, which is incapable of doing good or pursuing peace and accepts as inevitable the spread of war and violence. We must redouble our efforts to replace this culture with a culture of life and peace in which Governments and the international community fulfil their fundamental responsibility to protect all people.