



Statement by H.E. Archbishop Bernardito Auza  
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Agenda Item 29: **Advancement of women**  
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Mr. Chair,

My Delegation thanks the Secretary-General and the Special Rapporteurs for drawing our attention to the global reality of violence against women and girls, especially women in politics, and to the scourge of human trafficking and modern forms of slavery.

Pope Francis has called trafficking in persons a “crime against humanity”<sup>1</sup> that must be consistently denounced and fought by all. Today, when slavery is thought to be a tragic historical memory, there are in fact more persons enslaved than ever before.

The Special Rapporteur’s report praises the rise of women-led anti-slavery movements “organizing for better protection of the rights of domestic, agricultural and migrant workers.”<sup>2</sup> Among others, Catholic sisters around the world contribute to this important effort through international networks of Consecrated Life against trafficking in persons, such as *Talitha Kum*, or through investing in education and youth employment, thus addressing some of the deepest causes that make women and girls vulnerable to traffickers.

In this regard, Pope Francis recalled an uncomfortable truth when he observed that “if there are so many young women victims of trafficking who end up on the streets of our cities, it is because many men here – young, middle-aged, elderly – demand these services.”<sup>3</sup> We have a duty in justice to arrest and prosecute traffickers, but we must also remember, if we are to eliminate this evil, that converting hearts, stamping out the demand and drying up the market are indispensable.

Mr. Chair,

It is heartening to learn that “millions of women now actively participate in public and political life as members of political parties, elected officials or civil servants” and that “more than 10,000 women today serve as national parliamentarians.”<sup>4</sup> These women

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis. Address to Participants in the International Conference on Combatting Human Trafficking, Vatican, 10 April 2014.

<sup>2</sup> A/73/139, 11.

<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, Address to Participants in the World Day of Prayer, Reflection and Action Against Human Trafficking, 12 February 2018.

<sup>4</sup> A/73/301, 7.

make “an indispensable contribution” in government to the “establishment of economic and political structures ever more worthy of humanity.”<sup>5</sup> As they build up our communities, more must be done to protect them from violence and intimidation.

The Holy See condemns all forms of violence against women, including harmful stereotypes that justify violence and promote discrimination against them. During his visit to Peru earlier this year, Pope Francis affirmed that “violence against women cannot be treated as ‘normal,’ maintaining a culture of machismo blind to the leading role that women play in our communities.” He said that we cannot “look the other way and let the dignity of women, especially young women, be trampled upon.”<sup>6</sup>

The Secretary-General’s report details a disturbing prevalence of physical, verbal, and even “cyber” violence against women and girls and highlights the need for legal measures to protect women’s participation in the community, without fear of violence. Though it is encouraging to learn about increased awareness-raising campaigns and increased engagement of men, boys and community leaders, it is, however, a matter of serious concern that still, in many countries, authors of domestic violence remain unpunished.<sup>7</sup> Families are the glue of society, and so when the family becomes a place of violence, the effects are catastrophic for all. We must therefore act against this source of suffering with every possible legal instrument and through the promotion of a culture that repudiates every form of violence.

Mr. Chair,

Another form of violence and exclusion comes as a result of what Pope Francis calls the “throwaway culture.” At the recent World Meeting of Families in Ireland, he noted that the culture in which we are living “discards everything... that is not useful. It discards babies because they are troublesome; it discards the elderly because they aren’t useful.”<sup>8</sup> Society suffers when we do not include the elderly, and elderly women in particular are too often marginalized as being no longer of value. Yet they, our grandmothers, are the ones who pass culture, values and wisdom to younger generations, assuring in this way a healthy continuity between the past and the future.

While building a bright future for our societies, we must find ways to acknowledge and support the many unsung women who, each in her own way, sustain and transform families and communities. They deserve our gratitude and love, for it is they who save us from becoming discarded in today’s throwaway culture.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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<sup>5</sup> John Paul II, “Letter to Women,” 1995, 2.

<sup>6</sup> Pope Francis, Greeting to the local population, Puerto Maldonado, 19 January 2018.

<sup>7</sup> A/73/294, 34 and 45.

<sup>8</sup> Pope Francis, Address at the Feast of Families, Dublin, 25 August 2018.