



Statement by H.E. Archbishop Bernardito Auza  
Apostolic Nuncio, Permanent Observer of the Holy See

Seventy-third Session of the United Nations General Assembly, Third Committee  
Agenda Item 70: **Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Children**  
New York, 9-11 October 2018

Mr. Chair,

The Holy See considers the Convention on the Rights of the Child a “laudable instrument aimed at protecting the rights and interests of children, who are ‘that precious treasure given to each generation as a challenge to its wisdom and humanity’.”<sup>1</sup> It constitutes a statement of priorities and obligations that serve as a reference point and stimulus for action so that no child will be left without a legal guarantee of his or her fundamental rights.

My Delegation attributes particular significance to the Convention’s recognition of the irreplaceable role of the family in fostering the growth and well-being of its members.<sup>2</sup> The family is the first and vital cell of society because of its service to life, its unique role in the education of its members, and its part in developing a sound and flourishing social fabric.

The family is the setting in which a new life is not only born but welcomed. Parents have the first and primary responsibility to protect and nurture it in all the phases of its growth. The well-being of children, therefore, depends greatly on the measures taken by States to support families to fulfill their natural life-giving and formative functions. At the same time, States should play a subsidiary role because, as Pope Francis said to the General Assembly in 2015, “integral human development and the full exercise of human dignity cannot be imposed. They must be built up and allowed to unfold for each individual, for every family, in communion with others, and in a right relationship with all those areas in which human social life develops.”<sup>3</sup>

The gratuitous dimension of love that exists within families makes the family an integral part of the response to children’s needs, especially when they are sick. The report of the Secretary-General shows that child mortality remains unacceptably high, with 5.6 million children dying in 2016, mostly of preventable causes.<sup>4</sup> Women and children, therefore, need to be more adequately supported through the provision of quality maternal and child healthcare and integrated family-based services.

---

<sup>1</sup> Declaration of the Holy See upon ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, quoting the words of Pope John Paul II from 26 April 1984.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Convention on the Rights of the Child, Preamble.

<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, Address to the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization, New York, 25 September 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. A/73/272, 6.

Childhood, given its fragile nature, has unique and indispensable needs. One of the most important is to receive adequate education, in the family, in school and in the wider community. States have a duty to promote a culture that allows children to enjoy the right to education and to discover their role and responsibilities within their family and community. This cannot be done without the recognition of the inalienable right of the parents to educate their children according to their religious and cultural values, especially in the areas where the dignity of the person is at stake.

Mr. Chair,

Millions of children of all ages, races and cultures, and regardless of socioeconomic status or geography, are victims of various forms of violence, mistreatment, exploitation and abuse. No effort must be spared to create a culture capable of protecting the young and vulnerable.

Children on the move, in particular, are often forgotten or ignored. As Pope Francis has pointed out, “Among migrants, children constitute the most vulnerable group, because as they face the life ahead of them, they are invisible and voiceless: their precarious situation deprives them of documentation, hiding them from the world’s eyes; the absence of adults to accompany them prevents their voices from being raised and heard. In this way, migrant children easily end up at the lowest levels of human degradation, where illegality and violence destroy the future of too many innocents, while the network of child abuse is difficult to break up.”<sup>5</sup>

Mr. Chair,

Children represent both fragility and hope. The promotion and protection of the rights of children is one of the greatest contemporary social challenges and should remain at the center of our attention. The future depends on children and on how we prepare them for adulthood. Only by firmly locating the integral development of children within the family, as the Convention on the Rights of the Child so wisely acknowledges, can we build hope for the future and ensure harmony between the generations. Children are the joy of the family and of society. Each child is a gift, unique and irreplaceable.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

---

<sup>5</sup> Pope Francis, Message for the 2017 World Day of Migrants and Refugees.