



Intervention by H. E. Archbishop Ivan Jurkovič,
Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations and Other International
Organizations in Geneva, at the side event on
“Building peace and reconciliation through the creation of a Ministry of Peace”
Geneva, 20 September 2019

Excellencies, distinguished guests,

I wish to express my gratitude to Associazione Papa Giovanni XXIII and to the Permanent Mission of San Marino for organizing this important event on an issue which is very close to the heart and mission of the Church and of the Holy See: peace.

Incarnated in the world by its faith, its teaching and the commitment of many believers, the Church has not only the right, but also the duty to share the worries and hopes of the world. This concern that it bears for each person and for the whole of humanity is the only interest that the Holy See defends in the framework of its diplomatic action and on the international scene, including, of course, here at the United Nations in Geneva.

The desire for peace is rooted deeply in the human heart. Peace is not simply the absence of warfare. Peace must be seen in its positive and dynamic connotation: peace is not simply acknowledging the status quo, but rather a continuous and proactive improvement of our situation as human family.

Indeed, peace is also the necessary condition for the construction of fraternal societies, just and respectful of the human dignity shared by all. Pope Francis summarizes in a few words the foundations of peace: “The desire for peace can never be satisfied by military means alone [...] Peace must be built on justice, socio-economic development, freedom, respect for fundamental human rights, the participation of all in public affairs and the building of trust between peoples”.¹

Yet, free to choose peace or violence and fear, humans throughout history have often succumbed to the temptation of power and the search for a world order imposed by the force of arms. Tragically, this has cost too much in the past and continues to be the tragedy of our current world, a situation that Pope Francis described as a “piecemeal World War”. The figures of military expenditures alone illustrate the extent of this. Over 1.8 trillion USD were spent last year on military purposes. This huge sum, compared with the modest amount allocated to humanitarian aid, could have been enough to ensure that nations could live in peace and dignity.

¹ Message of Pope Francis to the President of the Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons, 7 December, 2014.

Regrettably, there is a deep chasm that separates commitments from actions in the field of disarmament. While everyone condemns the grave effects of arms proliferation, the search for economic profit still dominates over any humanitarian concern. As Pope Francis observed: “We say the words ‘No more war!’ but at the same time we manufacture weapons and sell them... to those who are at war with one another.” This sadly reminds me of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde in the famous novel of Scottish author Robert Stevenson. Trying to play the role of Dr. Jekyll, the good guy, by promoting noble principles, while in reality being Mr. Hyde, the evil guy, by exporting weapons and fueling crisis.

In this regard, if the Holy See opted for an observer status at the United Nations, it made a different choice in the field of disarmament. In the wake of the devastation and desolation of World War II, the Holy See wished to make its contribution to initiatives like disarmament which promote security, mutual trust and peaceful co-operation in relations between peoples. The Holy See considered it a moral obligation to join and encourage the international community as an active key player in the creation and shaping of appropriate mechanisms and negotiated treaties that prohibit and regulate the use of arms.

In particular, the Holy See has taken a strong position on the elimination of nuclear weapons, with a view to ban them once and for all, by adopting “the ethic of responsibility” to replace “the ethic of fear.”²

At a time when the world was in the midst of the Cold War, in the wake of the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962, which brought the world to the brink of a third world war and terrified people around the world with the spread of nuclear weapons, Pope John XXIII in his Encyclical “Peace on Earth” (known with its latin name “Pacem in Terris”) in 1963 denounced this arms race, particularly condemning the enormous cost and resources devoted to it, and appealed for a process of disarmament by every nation.

In many ways it is this Document of Pope John XXIII that also paved the way for strong involvement of the Catholic Church and faith-based organizations in the promotion of human rights, justice, peace-building and peaceful resolution of conflicts. This same Document (Peace on Earth) ends with an exhortation to uphold the four pillars of peace – truth, justice, love and freedom - virtues that need to be pursued and concretized.

Looking at the world’s current realities, we need to ask ourselves if justice and solidarity are only present in our dictionaries or if we are truly working hard so that they become a reality.³ In pursuit of this goal to inspire and support every initiative that aims to ensure the diverse peoples and countries a path to peace, education has a central role to play.⁴

In an attempt to encourage this goal, last year Pope Francis instituted at the Pontifical Lateran University an academic program in Peace Studies, as a curriculum which coincides with the theological, philosophical, juridical, economic and social spheres.

2 Message of Pope Francis to the President of the Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons, 7 December, 2014.

3 Cf. Address of Pope Francis to participants in the conference for the 50th anniversary of Pacem in Terris, 3 October 2013.

4 Cf. Letter of Pope Francis for the Inauguration of the Academic Year of the Pontifical Lateran

The curricular structure is a bachelor's degree course as well as a Master's degree on "Science of Peace and International Cooperation". With this new program of studies, a first of its kind, Pope Francis wishes to encourage professors, students and all staff members to feel involved in sowing the seeds of the culture of peace. I am also pleased to share with you that this academic program in Peace Studies is going to have a close collaboration with the University for Peace in Costa Rica.

When I heard about the creation of this new curricular program, I was reminded of Pope Paul VI words when he asked: what are the weapons of "defend" peace? His answer was that what is needed above all are "moral weapons", starting from the life-long commitment of education for current and future generations.

Indeed, the promotion of a culture of peace among the youth is crucial for a future of peace. Key to instilling this value in children is to educate them in a "culture of encounter" to enable them to respond actively and constructively to the many forms of violence, poverty, exploitation, discrimination, marginalization, and other indignities.

Today, in spite of the presence of conflicts in the world (I am thinking of Syria, Yemen, Libya etc), in the times we live in, especially in the Western world, we have grown accustomed to taking peace for granted. Historians have pointed out that prolonged times of peace (e.g. the so-called Pax Romana in the Roman empire times) are particularly dangerous, as they leave the impression that major conflicts are never going to break out.

We seem to have lost the sentiments of "fear of war". On the contrary, we have developed the thinking that war per se is not such a dramatic and terrible event. A dramatic evidence of these reality is given by the violence pervasive of war videogames: there are so many children that play these violent wargames, where killing and destroying is depicted as a hobby and as a leisure activity.

I believe it is important to insist on the immorality of this approach. We need to insist on changing this mentality because it trivializes the suffering of others and do not contribute to the spread of noble values such as compassion, dialogue, and cooperation.

The Church invites everyone to educate for peace in a truly global and comprehensive endeavor. As a positive development, but certainly as a minimum first step only, the International Committee of the Red Cross has started to collaborate with programmers and developers of war videogames so that respect for international humanitarian law could be "built-in" the game, so that players may learn, for instance, to protect civilian population and civilian objects.

Educational institutions must therefore seek to impart to them the "grammar of dialogue" which, as Pope Francis recently affirmed, is the basis of encounter and the means of harmonizing cultural and religious diversity. Forming the youth and children in this grammar of intellectual conversation, aimed at discovering the truth together, will leave them with the motivation to build bridges and find peaceful solutions to the various forms of violence in our time.

In conclusion, just like the old saying that “Rome was not built in a day”, building peace is an ongoing and dynamic process: even once it seems to be achieved, we cannot take for granted. Indeed, peace is the only true direction of human progress⁵. As Pope Francis recalled: “peace is a gift, a challenge and a commitment.”⁶ It is a gift, because it flows from the very heart of God. It is a challenge, because it should never be taken for granted and must constantly be sought. It is a commitment, because it demands passionate effort on the part of all people of goodwill to seek and strive for peace.⁷

Thank you for your attention.

5 Cf. Pope Paul VI, Message for the First World Day of Peace, 1 January 1968.

6 Pope Francis, Address to the Members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, 9 January 2017.

7 Message of Pope Francis to the 2017 World Day of Peace