



Statement by H.E. Archbishop Bernardito Auza
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Seventy-first Session of the United Nations General Assembly, Sixth Committee
Agenda Item 108: **Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism**

Mr. Chair,

At the outset, let me congratulate you on your election as Chair of the Sixth Committee. My delegation looks forward to collaborate with you during this session.

Mr. Chair,

The Holy See wishes to remember the victims of terrorism as well as those communities and individuals who continue to suffer due to terrorism. Their memory and pain must give a renewed sense of urgency and momentum to the important work of this Committee.

The Holy See's condemnation of terrorism is absolute: there are no ideological, political, philosophical, racial, ethnic, or religious reasons to justify or excuse it. Terrorism violates fundamental human dignity and rights; the terrorists disdain for life and fundamental freedoms, their unspeakable crimes against women and girls, and the utter barbarity of their acts cannot leave us indifferent.

Terrorism can only be countered by more cohesive measures at the international level. As terror knows no border, the international community as a whole must deny terrorists access to cyber technologies to recruit new adherents from many parts of the world, finance their activities and coordinate terror attacks. No one should be permitted to finance or to provide arms and ammunitions to terrorists. Those who abet violent extremism or shelter members of terrorist groups must be held accountable before a court of law. Similarly, all violations of international humanitarian law and crimes against humanity committed by terror groups must be vigorously pursued.

On the other hand, all measures to combat terrorism must scrupulously respect human rights and international humanitarian law. In this regard, the recent decisions of the European Court of Human Rights in the *Al-Dulimi case* and of the Court of Justice of the European Communities in the *Kadi case* deserve a close study.

Moreover, there can be no conflict between the effective implementation of measures to contrast terrorism and the provision of humanitarian assistance, directed to protect the fundamental human rights to life and health. Thus, the contrast of terrorist activities should not inhibit nor limit the capacity of governmental, non-governmental and religiously-inspired organizations to provide humanitarian aid to vulnerable groups or persons, such as emergency relief to refugees and displaced persons and medical services to the wounded.

Mr. Chair,

Measures to counter terrorism must address those social and political conflicts that fuel violence or deepen hatred among the various communities. In effect, the persecution of social or national groups, deep social injustices, the violation of fundamental rights and freedoms, ethnic and religious discrimination, as well as gaping social and economic inequalities create the conditions that may foster radicalization. Pope Francis has emphasized that, whenever justice and the common good are violated, violence always ensues.¹ Thus, all governments should engage with civil society to address the challenges faced by those individuals and communities most at risk of radicalization and recruitment, with a view to fostering their social integration.

The fight against terrorism begins with the hearts and minds of those young people who are most vulnerable to radicalization and ideological brainwashing. Education thus plays a crucial role in the prevention of terrorism. In this regard, the Catholic Church is privileged to be entrusted each year with the education of around fifty million primary and secondary school children worldwide and millions more at the tertiary level. This education is offered as a service for the children and the young of all faiths and no faith, and from every economic stratum, with a particular preference for those whose educational opportunities are limited or even non-existent. In performing this service, Catholic educational institutions strengthen societies by forming responsible and peace-loving citizens.

Furthermore, religious leaders must take the lead in rejecting the narratives and ideologies that engender radicalization, hatred and extremism. Religions must unite in confronting all forms of religious bigotry, stereotyping and disrespect for what people hold sacred. It is therefore a primary duty of religious leaders to refute and denounce the tendentious ideologies of terror purportedly inspired by religious injunctions or texts.

Pope Francis continues to advocate the practice of encounter, of dialogue, of building bridges as antidotes to radicalization and extremist violence. Refusal to dialogue is in fact one of the defining characteristics of fundamentalism. The Holy See believes therefore that, no matter how grave the threats that terrorism poses to our collective security, any effective, lasting response to this crime cannot be achieved solely through military and security means, but rather through a culture of encounter that fosters mutual acceptance and promotes peaceful and inclusive societies.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

¹ Laudato Si' 159.