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What the Holy See Is Telling the UN (Part 2)

Archbishop Chullikatt Explains Rio+20

RIO DE JANEIRO, Brazil, JUNE 28, 2012 (Zenit.org).- Archbishop Francis Chullikatt, the permanent observer of the Holy See's Mission to the United Nations, participated last week in a major UN conference in Brazil, Rio+20.

He explained to us both the conference itself, and the message the Holy See tried to promote there.

Part 1 of this interview was published on Wednesday

ZENIT: How is the Family relevant for sustainable development?

Archbishop Chullikatt: It is the family where life, survival and development begin, and where children are first educated to adopt a vocational and ethical attitude, which freely assumes responsibility, in genuine solidarity with one another and all of creation. The uniqueness of the institution of the family, the legal obligation to protect it, and its importance for sustainable development, poverty eradication and the green economy may be summarized as follows:

The family is a community of solidarity

The family is a community of love, harmony and solidarity, based on the enduring bond of communion between the husband and wife, which is uniquely suited by its nature to give birth to children, teach respect, distinction and complementarity between the two sexes and transmit the cultural, ethical, social, spiritual, and religious values, essential for the integral development and well-being of children, of extended family relations, and of society. (Preamble E, Charter on the Rights of the Family)

The family is a unique social institution

The family is an unrepeatable social institution that cultivates within its members a sense of their inherent dignity, from which rights and duties derive. It also develops each member's sense of acquired dignity, which comes to fulfilment through a fully and harmonious developed personality, gradually formed and educated in authentic freedom and responsible life in society.

The family is enriched by inter/intra-generational relationships

The family is enriched and extended by inter-generational solidarity and inter/intra-generational transmission of values which assist members to grow in human wisdom to appreciate a sustainable comprehensive management of the environment, natural resources, and the universal destination of goods, while ensuring that the inherent dignity of the human person is not violated in attempts to preserve the environment.

The family is a principal agent of peace

The family is a principal agent of peace where the same love that nurtures its members, and builds and maintains unity and harmony in the family, is vital to the building of peace in society.

The family is an economic unit

The family is an economic unit which naturally produces and forms human capital and provides workers, consumers, and service providers, especially for its most vulnerable members.

It is deeply unfortunate that the aforementioned role of the family has not been fully recognized in the Outcome Document despite having been proposed many times by the delegation of the Holy See.

ZENIT: What are your key concerns regarding the Outcome document?

Archbishop Chullikatt: The Outcome Document is the result of a series of complex multilateral negotiations which lasted almost a year. It is not a perfect document. However, the international community, with the required political will and through strict implementation of the applicable measures, can render it fruitful.

The negotiations of the Outcome Document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development provided a unique opportunity for the Holy See and for all members of the Catholic community to gather in Rio to articulate a message for the international community, which moves from a charity or concern for our fellow brothers and sisters rooted in self-interest or sentimentality to one which fosters deep love and genuine solidarity for all our brothers and sisters around the world.

During negotiations, movement was slow on certain sections of the outcome document where deep tensions emerged on international economic and financial realities. Inequalities between regions, especially in Africa, put pressure on certain delegations, especially those of the developed world, to concretely demonstrate solidarity by realistically striving to eradicate poverty and hunger as the primary obstacles to development.

The Outcome Document should have adopted measures to transfer suitable technologies to the local level, to promote a more equitable and inclusive global market, to respect commitments made to provide aid-development, and to find new ways to put human dignity, the common good and the protection of creation at the center of economic life.

In addition, there is concern in regard to the meaning and application of certain concepts. While notions such as “green economy” could provide an opportunity to produce and create new avenues for greater care of the environment, we must recognize that technological solutions unaccompanied by just, ethical and responsible considerations and involvement of local communities will not assist the poor.

Those applying the Rio+20 Outcome Document must put the wellbeing of the human person at the center of concern of sustainable development. Such an approach will help to avoid, among other things, the risks of reductionist and sterile neo-malthusian approaches, which view human beings as obstacles to development, an inherently flawed vision which some delegations of developed nations attempted to weave into the Outcome Document.

There is no conflict between human beings and their development. In order to eradicate poverty and hunger we need to empower the human person. We must encourage peoples and nations to shape their own future, “a future they need”, in accordance with their dignity, religious beliefs, cultures and proven traditions.

Regrettably, some delegations promoted the dubious notion of "sexual and reproductive rights". Fortunately, this expression does not appear in the document. This approach to sustainable development would have undermined the First Principle of Rio, namely: that the human being is at the centre of sustainable development. The human being is always an end in himself, and sustainable development is the means which serves that end. Any anti-life policy is anti-development. Any policy promoting abortion or abortifacients masquerading as contraceptives, fails in the same way by attacking the right to life in the safest sanctuary of the womb, and the health of the woman whose body created this home. In the end, such a policy is not at the service of health, children, their mothers or the family but amounts to violence against women and children and the family.

The Holy See gave a Statement of Position which takes issue with vague and ambiguous wording contained in the Outcome Document. For the Holy See, the term “sexual and reproductive health,” found in the document, should be applied to a holistic concept of health that embraces the person in the entirety of his or her personality, mind and body, and which fosters the achievement of personal maturity in sexuality and in the mutual love and decision making that characterizes the conjugal relationship in accordance with the norms of the natural moral order.

Moreover, unfortunately, the Outcome Document of this Conference neglected the fundamental role that religious organizations play in promoting sustainable development. Religious institutions, such as those of the Catholic Church, play a fundamental role in educating people on the need to love and care for the poor out of love and solidarity. In addition, these institutions provide education to millions of children around the world so that they can be productive and responsible members of society and future leaders of our countries. Moreover, religious organizations also play a vital role of living in solidarity with the most vulnerable persons in society and providing a voice to the voiceless. Failure to fully engage religious institutions in order to achieve a human centred sustainable development is a failure to recognize the true nature of the human person and recognize the innate spiritual dimension of individuals and society.

In addition, it is important to understand that the poor and developing countries arrived at the Conference with a lot of expectations. They sought assistance, solidarity and expertise, especially at the social, financial and economic levels from their brothers and sisters of developed nations. However, many felt disillusioned that the Outcome Document of this Conference failed to deliver for them. Governments need to make good on their promises; otherwise a prosperous and better future will always remain a dream for the most vulnerable persons in the world.

In conclusion, new development models created or promoted as a result of this recently concluded Conference must be respectful of the human person and promote a more just and caring international community. Moreover, such models should be guided by the principles I mentioned earlier regarding the Holy See’s position on this issue. While political debate is necessary, willingness to live and work in solidarity with our brothers and sisters around the world is needed,

otherwise sustainable development will forever remain a distant and unrealized dream. The world has changed a great deal since the first Rio Conference but despite the progress, far too many children go without food, far too many families see their homes and communities destroyed by man-made and environmental catastrophes, and far too many people are depressed, disappointed and disillusioned. Now is the time for governments to recognize that sustainable development starts with the human person and his/her family. This is the way to build “a future we need.” This is the way to true progress.

This is the way to a more just and equitable world for all.

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On ZENIT's Web page:

Part 1: <http://www.zenit.org/article-35093?l=english>