



Statement of Rev. Msgr. Julien Kaboré, chargé d'affaires a.i., Apostolic Nunciature in Ireland, Head of Delegation of the Holy See at the adoption of the “Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences arising from the use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas (EWIPA)”

Dublin, 18 November 2022

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

At the outset, the Holy See wishes to express its gratitude to Ireland for the time and resources devoted to finalizing the present political declaration. Please allow me to congratulate the other States that have decided to endorse it, as well.

Firmly convinced that one of the highest aspirations of humankind is the abolition of conflict and the achievement of peace and justice (*tranquillitas ordinis*), the Holy See actively negotiated and ultimately endorsed the declaration in the hope of encouraging the international community to further limit and, to the greatest possible extent, avoid the human suffering caused by armed conflict.

Although many States worked for an even stronger, steadfast commitment to preventing the humanitarian consequences arising from the use of EWIPA, this political declaration represents an important step forward in protecting the most precious gift we have received, that is, human life.

Mr. Chair,

There is no doubt that peace is the best guarantee of respect for human life. Indeed, armed conflicts disfigure the bonds between brothers and sisters and between peoples. They disfigure those who suffer such atrocities, but also those who perpetrate them.

His Holiness Pope Francis has decried the “madness” of war and made clear that the first victim of every conflict is “the human family’s innate vocation to fraternity”¹, noting that “war is a failure of politics and of humanity”². In the present geopolitical context, Pope Francis has also said that we are living through a “third world war being fought “piecemeal” – [but] perhaps we can now say that it is “all out” [war] – putting people and the planet at ever greater risk.”³Therefore, today, we must agree that respect for International

¹ Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter “Fratelli Tutti”, par. 39.

² *Ibid.* paragraph 261

³ Pope Francis, Address to the Pontifical Academy of Science, 10 September 2022

Humanitarian Law (IHL) is all the more crucial for the protection of the dignity of both combatants and the civilian population.

The dramatic humanitarian impact of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas is a grim reminder and a common element of the tragedy and cruelty of conflicts across the world. The reality on the ground offers no misinterpretation. Despite existing legal protections, civilians in densely populated areas continue to be victims of armed conflicts. While parties to armed conflicts engage in different means and methods of warfare, it is not without limits. Moreover, the “legal” limits of warfare are not the only measure of acceptability. The cumulative effects of the use of explosive weapons must also be taken into account.

In the context of urban warfare, civilians are not collateral damage. They make up the overwhelming majority of casualties and wounded. The minimum of protection offered by IHL, which ought to be guaranteed with great vigilance, is violated far too often in the name of so-called military necessity or political demands.⁴

While keeping in mind the complexities of armed conflicts as well as the morally compromising decision to take human life, this declaration presents an opportunity and an invitation to shift from the paradigm of “collateral damage” to one of “intended protection” so as to truly minimize and hopefully avoid loss of human life.

In this regard, the Holy See hopes that, where respect for IHL is met with hesitation and omission, individual conscience may acknowledge the moral duty to respect and protect the dignity of the human person in every circumstance.⁵

Mr. Chair,

The legacy of past and present conflicts should not continue to hold hostage whole populations and generations. For this reason, the reference to victims in the declaration is most welcome, as the users of explosive weapons must also recognize, in one way or another, their responsibility towards the victims.

In this regard, The Holy See believes that many of the humanitarian principles contained in this political declaration are reflected in the mission of Catholic military chaplains who are called, in addition to carrying out their specific religious ministry, to give “military staff an appropriate education in the values that motivate humanitarian law and make it not merely a juridical code, but first and foremost an ethical code”⁶

⁴ Message of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Vienna Conference on Protecting Civilians in Urban Warfare, Vienna, 1 October 2019.

⁵ Cf. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2017/october/documents/papa-francesco_20171028_diritto-internazionale-umanitario.html

⁶ Cf. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2003/march/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20030325_cappellani-militari.html

With reference to paragraphs 1.10 and 4.5, the Holy See wishes to place on record that it understands “gender” and related terms as referring to male and female, in accordance with its Final Statement delivered at the conclusion of the Beijing Conference on Women, on 15 September 1995: “The Holy See thus excludes dubious interpretations which assert that sexual identity can be adapted indefinitely to suit new and different purposes.”⁷

In closing, the Holy See, in conformity with its own nature and mission, looks forward to the implementation of the present political declaration, in coordination with other States, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), as well as civil society. Every step taken in this right direction contributes to increasing the awareness that the cruelty of conflicts must be eradicated and replaced by a culture of life, justice and peace, based upon the dignity of the human person and the primacy of the rule of law, through the responsible, honest and consistent cooperation of all the members of the Community of Nations.

Thank you.

⁷ Cf. Holy See’s Final Statement at the 4th World Conference on Women, Beijing, 1995).