

Introduction of Holy See Side Event “Peacebuilding: A Role for Religion”

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A century and a half ago, Karl Marx said that religion was the opium of the peoples, meaning that it can easily be used to control the population, to divert their attention from wanting to start a social revolution by promising them a paradise in the afterlife. Today, on the contrary, religion is said to be the vitamin of the poor. It gives the poor a precise identity, a sense of belonging, to those who otherwise can be left behind on the road to globalization.

Everyone is aware of the impact that religion can play in conflict as well as in peacebuilding. Due to its importance for most people, we sincerely believe that local and international religious leaders can and must have a positive role to play in the reconciliation process. Their contribution to the process of peacebuilding is not necessarily in terms of mediation, resolution or prevention, as these are outlined by the international juridical instruments, but in their own terms.

Alex Boraine, Deputy President of South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, stated that initially he was very reluctant and worried about Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s explicit and deliberate use of religion and religious symbols in the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. But later was converted to the idea of the positive role religion can play in the process of reconciliation, having witnessed the good fruits it produced.

My delegation cooperated in the drafting of, and was pleased with, last year’s approval of guidelines for civil society participation in the PBC. This participation would be decisive on the ground where, among other stakeholders, faith-based organizations are fully engaged in human development and are at the forefront in fostering dialogue, in peacemaking and in post-conflict reconciliation.

I thank you all for the interest you are taking in this topic. I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge and thank our Moderator and Panelists. I have the pleasure to introduce our Moderator, the distinguished Permanent Representative of Angola, Ambassador Ismael Gaspar Martins, who in his turn will introduce our panelists.

Ambassador Gaspar Martins, who, in his seven year long tenure at the UN, besides giving many brilliant contributions to this Organization, not least of which was a seat in the Security Council, has been tremendously instrumental in setting up the PBC and has not spared time, competence and personal commitment in skillfully ferrying the PBC –as its first President– through the difficult times of its organization.

I have no doubt that Ambassador Gaspar Martins is the best equipped person to lead us today in an interesting and fruitful debate.

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