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# Archbishop Caccia Delivers Statement At The Third Committee On Rights Of Children.

**By H. E. Archbishop Gabriele Caccia**

Apostolic Nuncio and Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations

Mr. Chair,

The Holy See welcomes the discussion on the promotion and protection of the rights of children, who - as vulnerable members of the human family - deserve our special protection and care.

Pope John Paul II proclaimed that “No country on earth, no political system can think of its own future otherwise than through the image of these new generations that will receive from their parents the manifold heritage of values, duties and aspirations of the nation to which they belong and of the whole human family.”[1]

At that time, the Pope expressed hope that the third Millennium, would bring a brighter future for all children around the globe. Perhaps it would be beneficial to consider whether this wish is becoming a reality.

As the Declaration on the Rights of the Child recognizes, “mankind owes to the child the best it has to give.”[2] This duty, always a sizeable task, is further complicated by the many challenges which particularly affect children and the enjoyment of their rights.

Children are more likely to live in poverty than adults and constitute half of those living in extreme poverty, which can unfortunately lead to exploitation and abuse. It is estimated that 160 million children worldwide are subjected to forced child labor, the worst forms of which include enslavement. They are victims of and forced to fight in armed conflicts, exposed to sexual violence and abuse, and fall prey to human trafficking. Some are engaged in work that exposes them to physical and mental harm. It is shameful that this exploitation continues to be a part of our global economy while damaging children’s health, education, and future prospects. Ending such horrific practices requires addressing

the root causes, including through poverty eradication, while pursuing economic policies that support family life.

Poverty is also a major cause of so-called child “marriage”, a harmful practice that affects mostly girls. A family struggling to provide for its members may view the marriage of their daughter as a way of securing her future and easing its own financial burden. Harmful social norms that undervalue women and girls compared to boys and men also perpetuate this practice. These same social norms, often exacerbated by poverty, also contribute to the practices of prenatal sex selection and female infanticide, which end the lives of girls at the earliest stages. It is vital to promote the recognition of the equal dignity of women and girls with men and boys, so that these acts are condemned and outlawed. It is also necessary to address external aggravating factors such as poverty through education, social protection, and ensuring adequate living wages.

Children’s rights and dignity are also violated by practices that reduce them to objects or burdens to be acquired or discarded rather than gifts to be welcomed and cherished. Chief among these problems is the practice of abortion, which ends the lives of millions of children every year, hurting their parents, and undermining the conscience of society. Conversely, certain assisted reproductive practices turn nascent human beings into objects over which parents exercise a form of selfish selection, discarding those with disabilities and selecting on the basis of the expected characteristics of the child, many of which are in fact trivial. Surrogacy deprives children of their mothers — women whose own poverty often leads them to accept these arrangements. Pope Francis has called for an international ban on surrogacy, stressing that “[a] child is always a gift and never the basis of a commercial contract.”<sup>[3]</sup>

Mr. Chair,

As we commemorate the 30th anniversary of the International Year of the Family, we must recognize the important role that the family plays in promoting the well-being and rights of children. While every family has its challenges, a good family life is a strong protective factor for children. Parents provide mutual support and greater stability for their children, as well as a sense of identity and belonging. This in turn improves children’s development and success in adulthood, and promotes their enjoyment of their rights to health and education. The primary rights and responsibilities of parents should be properly understood as reflecting a duty of care which is in the best interests of the child. It is deeply regrettable that the importance of the family is increasingly being challenged, despite the recognition in international law that it should be afforded the “widest possible protection and assistance.”<sup>[4]</sup>

Mr. Chair,

As Pope Francis has said, “The way we relate to children, the extent to which we respect their innate human dignity and fundamental rights, expresses what kind of adults we are and want to be, and what kind of society we want to build.”<sup>[5]</sup> It is a collective responsibility to build a society that values all children and provides them with the resources they need to thrive.

Thank you.

[1] John Paul II, *Address to the General Assembly of the United Nations*, 2 October 2 1979, n. 21.

[2] Declaration on the Rights of the Child, A/Res/1386 (XIV), preambular paragraph 5.

[3] Pope Francis, Address to Members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, 8 January 2024.

[4] International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, art 10(1).

[5] Pope Francis, *Address to participants in the international conference “Eradicating Child Labor, Building a Better Future”*, 19 November 2021.



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