



Statement of H.E. Archbishop Bernardito Auza
Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations
at the 69th Session of the General Assembly
Third Committee: **Agenda Item 64 (a,b): Rights of Children**
New York, 17 October 2014

Madam Chair,

Last month, while opening the second regular session of the UNICEF Executive Board, the Executive Director Ambassador Anthony Lake did not dwell on the improvement achieved last year of the living conditions of children in the areas in which UNICEF traditionally operates. Instead, he focused on the growing number of humanitarian crises afflicting our world today, to keep us on the alert about the enormous challenges the international community faces in providing children the protection they are entitled to.

It is an unfortunate reality that every conflict, every outbreak of an epidemic, every natural disaster has the potential to roll back the steady progress the world has made in recent decades in reducing child mortality and improving access to nutrition, safe water and education.

But more tragic still when such rollbacks are caused by tragedies perpetrated by humans, in which children are specifically targeted, victimized and instrumentalized. This is what the Special Representatives of the Secretary General on *Children and armed conflicts* and on *Violence against children*, and the Special Rapporteur on the *Sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography* tell us in their Reports presented in this session. In recent years, almost three million children have been killed in armed conflicts; six million have been left disabled; tens of thousands mutilated by antipersonnel mines. In spite of the laudable efforts by many actors and governments, recruitment of child soldiers persists. Even more alarming are the facts that this has spread in some regions where this phenomenon was not rampant and that there have been recent cases of children forced to commit terrorist acts like suicide bombings.

Moreover, my delegation recalls that too many children are denied the most fundamental right to life; that prenatal selection eliminates babies suspected to have disabilities and female children simply because of their sex; that too many children still lack sufficient food and housing; that in many countries they have no access to medicines; that they are sold to traffickers, sexually exploited, recruited into irregular armies, uprooted by forced displacements, or compelled into debilitating work.

Eliminating violence against children demands that States, governments, civil society and religious communities support and enable the family to carry out its proper responsibility. Thus, my delegation attaches great importance to the commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family. It offers an opportunity to refocus on the role of the family in development and to reflect on what this primordial institution can do to face the multiple challenges threatening the holistic development of children in both developing and industrialised countries.

It is in the same vein that my delegation strongly concurs with the recommendation contained in the Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on violence against children that informed and engaged parents and caregivers who support and advise children in their access to the internet and the use of ICTs open avenues for a safer online experience. The caring mediation of parents minimises risks without limiting the child's skills and learning opportunities. To become parents is not simply a question of bringing children into the world, but also of educating them to become creative members of society and responsible citizens.

My delegation also welcomes the plan of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography to promote, facilitate and organise awareness-raising and advocacy activities, in order to enhance knowledge and visibility around these issues. Moreover, listening to the appeal of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on children and armed conflicts, the Catholic Church continues to commit itself to working for the release of child soldiers, in their education and reintegration into their families and societies.

In November, we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which remains a prominent standard in the promotion and protection of the rights of the child. The Holy See regards it as a proper and laudable recognition of the fundamental rights and inherent dignity of every human person acknowledged by the United Nations in various other instruments. It contains such fundamental principles as the protection of the rights of the child before as well as after birth, the family as the natural environment for the growth and education of children, and the right of the child to health care and education. Moreover, my delegation calls on governments and civil society to encourage all initiatives and activities aimed at the promotion and protection of the rights of the child and, in this context, welcomes the selection of this year's Nobel Peace Prize winners.

For its part, the Catholic Church, mainly through its more than 300,000 social and educational institutions around the world, especially in depressed and war-torn regions, will continue working daily to ensure both education and food for children, as well as the reintegration of the victims of violence into their families and into society.

Thank you, Madam Chair.