

Mr. Herrmann:

The Holy See is pleased that the Russian Federation presidency has chosen this topic for an open debate in the Security Council, thereby bringing it to the attention of the international community. The Holy See has long advocated for increased involvement by women in making, maintaining and building peace. Therefore it appreciates the initiatives promoted by the Security Council and Governments to raise awareness and arrive at a fuller recognition of the vital role of women in preventing the outbreak of war through mediation and preventive diplomacy, in reconciling, rehabilitating and rebuilding societies in post-war situations and in avoiding relapses into armed conflict. Women can, and should, play much greater roles in all of those processes. Their special capacities to bring order out of chaos, community out of division and peace out of conflict, and their special gifts in educating people to be more receptive and sensitive to the needs of others, are essential to our goal to spare our world from the scourges of war and to help to heal the wounds of earlier and current violent conflicts.

In order to harness the special capacities of women in peace and security, however, an international effort should be made to enable them to succeed, something that will be difficult to achieve if women still represent a disproportionate number of the world's disadvantaged. The lack of access for women and girls to education, particularly quality education, must be addressed. Sad to say, as Pope Francis pointed out in his 25 September 2015 address to the General Assembly (see A/70/PV.3), not everywhere are girls and women given full access to education. Most of the time that results in their being condemned to a second-class role within society and in their being given no possibility of being heard. Education is the great enabler for women, making it possible for them to be able to contribute fully to the promotion and consolidation of peace and harmony, not only in the family but also in local communities and in the entire world.

The Catholic Church has long placed great emphasis on the absolute necessity of giving young women and girls access to education. Today young women and girls constitute the majority of students in many of the more than 100,000 schools that the Catholic Church maintains worldwide, from kindergartens to universities, especially in regions where women and girls still suffer discrimination. They learn the skills needed to become well-trained educators and professionals, which will help them to contribute to a secure and safe society. The priority of ensuring a quality education for girls and women is essential if we hope that they will transmit to boys and men the necessary values to desist from violence and conflict. The role and influence of mothers are vital in the education of children and youth in the values of peace, mutual respect, reconciliation and healing. The peacemaking role of the mother in the family is of the essence, not merely for a peaceful and secure home but also for a peaceful and inclusive safe society.

Setting up women to succeed in using their talents for making, maintaining and building peace also requires combating poverty and ensuring access to other fundamental resources. In both urban and rural areas, it is far more common for women to lack access to basic services, including health care and social protections. In vast areas of the world, the lack of a consistent and nutritious food programme, clean water and sanitation services, as well as the lack of employment opportunities and decent pay, continue to undermine women's ability to play their role in the life of their families and society as a whole.

Helping women to bring healing to the world by addressing the causes and consequences of war and violence also means protecting them in that vital mission. The nearly 50 conflicts raging in various parts of the world today call upon us to concentrate our efforts on the plight of women and girls in violent situations. Women who have fallen victim to violence must be helped to overcome the stigma and shame to which they are being subjected in some societies, and they must be allowed to seek justice. It is so much more difficult for women to sustain their families and care for their family members who have been maimed by violence if their own wounds are not being treated and the injustices that they have suffered are not being remedied. With so much money available for weapons, cannot the world spare resources to compensate for the loss of life and limb in the families and homes of those innocent victims, so as to help them overcome the ravages of conflict and enable them to become peacemakers?

The fact that women suffer disproportionately from conflicts and wars, which they have not caused, creates a false impression that women are solely victims and not also peacemakers. It is high time — indeed, high time is long past — that that flawed image be laid to rest. The one sure way of achieving that is to harness to the fullest extent the active role of women in all phases of conflict prevention, mediation, conflict resolution and post-conflict peacebuilding. Without the input and specific skills of women, a deep understanding of the causes of conflicts and of the most effective solutions to end them and to build peace may never be fully attained.