

**Intervention of the Delegation of the Holy See
at the 48th Session of the Commission of the Status of Women
4 March, 2004**

On behalf of my Delegation, allow me to extend congratulations to you and the bureau on your election. You will have my Delegation's cooperation and keen interest in these proceedings.

In the context of their essential role to the maintenance of peace and security of the world, women have demonstrated time after time their substantial contributions that are based on untiring concern for achieving solidarity and the common good for all humanity. Women are especially gifted in showing others the urgent need to arise above self-interest and to work for the betterment of all so that the pressing needs of basic health care, education, and economic and social security become a reality now.

In many regions of the world, women are present and active in every area of life – social, economic, cultural, religious, and political – and make an indispensable contribution to the establishment of economic and political structures ever more worthy of humanity. Through feminine insight, women enrich the world's understanding and help to make human relations between and amongst people more honest and authentic.

Women do this all at great sacrifice. This sacrifice mandates authentic equality in every area: equal pay for equal work, protection for working mothers, fairness in career advancements, equality of spouses with regard to family rights, and the recognition of everything that is part of the rights and duties of all in a democratic society. This is a matter of justice and of necessity. My delegation supports these key elements of a just society found in the Beijing Platform for Action (Fourth World Conference on Women). In all these areas, a greater presence of women in society will prove most valuable and will help to manifest the contradictions present in society when it is organized solely according to the criteria of efficiency and productivity or of brute force.

With regard to the conflict prevention, conflict management and conflict resolution, my Delegation would like to underline a few aspects of the problem.

First of all, too many women today are still victims of violence and war. The United Nations have given attention appropriately on different occasions not only to the tragedy of domestic violence but has also expressed its commitment to overcoming the suffering endured by women in national and international conflicts; this includes the problem of refugee and internally displaced women who are having to cope not only with their own personal suffering but also with the fatigue and responsibility of taking care in such desperate situations of the children and elder members of the family. Sadly, when armed conflict emerges at any level, women become the special target of combatants in ways that dehumanize their dignity. The time has come to condemn and sanction vigorously all sexual brutalities perpetrated against women. In this regard, the involvement of women in assisting the victims of such violence can be of significant importance.

There is another form of conflict that has terrible consequences on the life of millions of human beings. We must not fail, in the name of respect due to them, to condemn the widespread hedonistic and commercial culture which encourages the systematic exploitation of girls and women. The trafficking in women and children must cease. The contribution of women in the decision-making process to combat this shameful trafficking can be decisive, because they are the first victims of such crimes.

My delegation is convinced that the road to ensure swift progress in achieving full respect for women and their identity involves more than simply the condemnation of discrimination and injustices, necessary though this may be. Such respect must first and foremost be achieved through an effective and intelligent campaign for the promotion of women, involving all sectors of the human society. Women should be teachers and builders of peace and should be given this opportunity by the means of an adequate preparation.

Thank you, Madame Chair.