



STATEMENT OF THE DELEGATION OF THE HOLY SEE  
AT THE 10TH UNITED NATIONS CONGRESS  
ON THE PREVENTION OF CRIME AND THE TREATMENT OF OFFENDERS

*Delivered by Msgr. Dominique Rézeau  
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Mr. President,

The Delegation of the Holy See wishes to contribute to the work of the 10th United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders by emphasising some of the social, moral and humanitarian aspects of the worldwide struggle against crime. In doing so, we certainly do not overlook the need, in this struggle, for individual States and the international community to take efficient measures on the technical and legal levels, and to arm themselves with the adequate and modern means to do so. However, at the time when the often mentioned globalization offers the citizens of our planet the tremendous opportunity to communicate, to understand each other better and to cooperate, it also opens wide the doors and affords the means to those who employ human genius in the service of evil and who take advantage of the exploitation of their fellow creatures.

1. In 1998 it was estimated that around four million women fell victim, one way or another, to the traffic in human beings. Young women, children and illegal immigrants are increasingly subjected to a sordid "trade", which recalls the darkest periods of slavery, supposedly abolished in our day. If it is necessary to fight resolutely against the criminal organizations and the individuals who control this trafficking in persons and to apply the utmost rigour of the law, not to forget the deplorable complicities they too often enjoy with certain high officials, nevertheless we cannot neglect the attention to the root causes of these phenomenons in the search for their solution.

The Draft *Declaration*, which is submitted to our consideration, mentions in paragraph 7, the undertaking "*to incorporate a crime prevention component into national and international development strategies*". It is a worthy remark, only and if it is coupled with a similar undertaking by individual States to adopt development policies which have a positive bearing on crime prevention and the parallel struggle against organized crime. If however, the Congress in which we are now taking part,

limits its crime prevention efforts to the mere suppression of criminal phenomena, without paying due attention to their economic, social and cultural causes, it may highly risk being fruitless.

We all know that forced immigration is most of the time due to unbearable poverty and inhuman living conditions and that, at the same time, the doors of the developed countries are closing ever more firmly in the face of those immigrants. Haven't we heard with astonishment, during a seminar organized last year by the International Organization for Migration, that a majority of girls questioned at a school in a Central European country were considering prostitution as a favourite means of securing their future? In this context, my Delegation takes the liberty, since the Draft *Declaration* mentions the three additional protocols to the *Convention against Transnational Organized Crime*, which is currently being negotiated in Vienna, to express its astonishment that it was proposed under Article 2 of the *Protocol against Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children*, to decriminalize the cases where adults would have given their "free and informed consent" to new forms of servitude. How could the consent to slavery ever justify its reintroduction, one way or another, in our modern society, especially when this aforementioned consent is dictated, in most cases, by abject poverty and misery?

2. Sensitive to the socio-economic conditions, which give rise to transnational organized crime, the Delegation of the Holy See also wishes to attract the attention of the participants in this Congress to its moral implications. The criminal nature of this phenomenon does not only manifest itself in scorning and violating principles of political and legal nature, but also in violating the fundamental moral values as such as the dignity and the inalienable rights of the human person. Likewise prevention cannot do without educational programmes in order to develop a culture of morality and legality. The Catholic Church, as of course other religious denominations and educational organizations, is deeply committed, through its various institutions throughout the world to civic and moral education, especially of young people. This commitment is particularly necessary in nations and sectors of the society where poverty and unemployment create fertile grounds for the penetration of criminal organizations which, through trade in sex, drugs or arms, etc., offer easy and substantial profits.

It seems also fundamental to us to reinforce the values of morality and legality in public opinion, in the mass media and in the various social institutions. Without them, Conventions, Declarations, as well as the most sophisticated legal instruments, will serve no purpose whatsoever. Without giving due consideration to what is right, fair and good, our societies will be unable to protect themselves against the open wound of organized crime. By the way, my Delegation has noted

with interest the emphasis laid in the introduction to the Draft Declaration on a criminal justice system "*fair and ethical*".

3. Finally, the Delegation of the Holy See would like to launch an urgent appeal to take into account assistance to victims of organized transnational crime, particularly when women, children or defenceless people are involved. We have gotten used, unfortunately, to the sight of these makeshift boats in which loads of illegal immigrants are piled up, to the daily shipwrecks and to the so-called "reception centres", where victims lose their very dignity. Some courageous press articles remind us, from time to time, of the physical and moral violence to which young women-victims of international procuring are subjected, even in our rich European capitals. While pursuing and punishing the organizers and perpetrators of these organized crimes at all levels, it is incumbent upon States to draw-up and implement, on the national and international levels, programmes for the protection and rehabilitation of victims, in particular minors and women from the most disadvantaged countries.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen, the year 2000 which we have just entered, is for many among us a Jubilee year, in other words, a year of jubilation and thanksgiving for all the gifts that we were given. However, as Pope John Paul II stressed at the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "*dignity, freedom and happiness will never be complete without solidarity*" (November 30, 1998). I would like to conclude by quoting further the words of the Holy Father for the World Day of Peace on January 1, 2000, which are very fitting for the work of our Congress: "*The promotion of peace and human rights, the fight against drug and arms traffickers, and against political and economic corruption: these are issues which nowadays no nation is in a position to face alone. They concern the entire human community, and thus they must be faced and resolved through common efforts*".

Thank you Mr. President.