

The 60th Anniversary of the United Nations: Homily of Archbishop Silvano M. Tomasi*

1. The 60th birthday of the United Nations was anticipated as an occasion for celebrating and for approving widespread reforms. But after the event that was marked by a summit of world leaders, the picture emerging is one of light and shadows, of a mixture of achievements and frustrations, a very human story.

States are now engaged in the discussion and in the implementation of the *2005 World Summit Outcome*, an agenda for peace, development, reform. There are glaring shortcomings in this document like the lack of consensus on arms control and nuclear non-proliferation issues and like the ambiguity in understanding the health of women and children in a rather ideologized context that would not exclude the unacceptable policy of abortion.

On the other hand, steps forward are obvious: the greater acceptance of the responsibility to protect for humanitarian reasons; the restructuring of the Human Rights Commission; the Peace-building Commission; the reaffirmation of the global partnership for development that includes the Millennium Development Goals.

These aspirations underscore the contemporary relevance of the United Nations and, at the same time, call for greater coherence in translating them into action. So many good resolutions are passed but not enforced, and the many millions who make up the «We, the People» of the United Nations Charter lose out when this happens, and especially the poor lose out.

As globalization becomes a more evident dimension of life and the rules of the economy seem to prevail on the world scene, the people must remain at the center of concern. And to avoid that individual persons and entire populations be reduced to a means for the benefit of only a small part of the world, the liberalization of markets and of the economy needs rules and social norms that take into account and direct progress – as already Pope Paul VI was saying and as it was often repeated by John Paul II – toward the development of the whole person and all persons.

2. Major challenges facing the United Nations service to the family of nations seem to come from the economy, from advanced technology, from information, all transnational phenomena that make the world a real global village.

How to enable the participation of all people in the decision-making

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process of economic and market mechanisms, in the centers where new technologies are elaborated, and in the organization of information, becomes the vocation of the United Nations for the building up of a society with a human face.

This form of participation complements the always valid task of the UN of pre-empting the threats to peace and of guaranteeing collective security. Peace and development are the two tracks on which security moves along in our interdependent and fragile world.

If at 60, the UN is showing its age and the need of reform, it remains, the Cardinal Secretary of State has said at the recent Summit, «necessary to promote peace and development in the world but it must be improved to meet the challenges of the present day». The question for us as Christians, as well as for all persons of good will, is how can we contribute to the improvement of the UN.

Is there a specific dimension we can bring from our faith tradition? Is there a vision we can offer that makes sense beyond all cultural and religious identities, a vision that can provide a clear goal and the strength necessary to pursue it?

3. If we compare the language of the United Nations and that, say, of the social doctrine of the Church we may discover that images and phrases and symbols are different in their formulation and expression, but that they converge on many substantive points, points of real contact. Allow me to highlight some of these points that are part and parcel of our daily work in the international system of agencies and offices linked to, or parallel to, the United Nations.

a) The «We, the People» of the UN Charter is an affirmation of solidarity. The human family comes from God and this common origin binds us together as children of the same Father in heaven. Rooted in this conviction, we extend a hand of friendship across borders and cultures. Jesus as our universal Redeemer offers his message and his salvation equally to all persons. Creation and redemption therefore are a constant invitation to inclusivity, to a global outlook and to a sense of genuine commitment to the entire human family and to the environment within which we all have to live and function.

b) Rooted as we are in this interdependence of origin and destination, we recognize in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights a valid reminder that people are bearers of rights not in isolation but rather bound together in reciprocity. A sense of balance derives from this approach, an interdependence of rights and duties. A stronger sense of universal human duties would benefit the cause of peace. The Lord tells us: Blessed are the peacemakers, those who see it as their duty to work for peace. The universality of fundamental human rights is based on the person itself and can find support in the moral and philosophical traditions of cultures, and these rights are undeniable.

c) If an essential core group of values and rights have to be universally recognized and must be operative toward everyone – no relativism –, legitimate pluralism is part of our daily experience. It applies, in particular, to inter-faith cooperation and dialogue between civilizations. With God as a point of reference and of reliance, dialogue among religions can foster common moral values and promote inter-cultural understanding and respect while theological and spiritual tenets are explored, and positive experiences exchanged. A bridge to stand must be securely based on two pillars. Effective dialogue requires the pillar of one's identity and the equally solid pillar of the identity of the partner. Without a clear religious identity we cannot dialogue in a meaningful way and so in today's pluralistic religious context everywhere, a religious literacy and spiritual insight in our faith are an indispensable requirement if we want to be effective instrument of peaceful and creative coexistence.

4. The mission of lay women and men serving the international community has a sound foundation in their Christian vocation that calls them to transform the temporal order. John Paul II adds: «The lay faithful are never to relinquish their participation in public life, that is, in the many different economic, social, legislative, administrative and cultural areas, which are intended to promote organically and institutionally the common good» (Christifideles laici, 42).

A great venture, both challenging and wonderful, is entrusted to lay faithful «called as they are to proclaim and to live the gospel in service to the person and to society while respecting the totality of the values and needs of both». In the daily work, besides professional competence and honest efforts, faith «can contribute much to make the family of man and its history more human» since it «imbues the daily activity of people with a deeper sense and meaning» (Gaudium et Spes, 40).

5. Dear Friends, to sustain this noble call to service in international structures we have come together this evening to add an essential dimension, a resource that makes fruitful our work and that provides new energy everyday: prayer and a reaffirmation of confidence in the Lord. In the first reading, St. Paul challenges his Roman readers: «With God on our side who can be against us?» (Rom. 8:31).

The patience and perseverance that are required, the courage to meet the «other» on our side, the solidarity with needy people we don't touch and see, the hidden service for security and peace we carry out, in all these facets of work, God is with us.

St. Paul continues: «Since God did not spare his own Son, but gave him up to benefit us all, we may be certain, after such a gift, that he will not refuse anything he can give».

He gives us his love and we share that love every day in our work to make the future more hopeful and kind for all people and for the whole family of nations.