



HOLY SEE

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**Statement by H.E. Archbishop Celestino Migliore
Apostolic Nuncio
Permanent Observer of the Holy See**

**Before the Special Political and Decolonization Committee
(Fourth Committee), on item 30:
United Nations Relief and Works Agency
for Palestine Refugees in the Near East**

New York, 1 November 2005

Mr Chairman,

My delegation, having carefully reviewed the Report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), expresses once again its appreciation for the work of the Agency during this time of significant challenges.

The Holy See willingly acknowledges the help that UNRWA offers all Palestinian refugees, without discrimination or reference to their religion, as is only just. Nevertheless, we are obliged this year to draw attention to the growing difficulties faced by Palestinian Christians who, although they belong to a faith born in that very land, are sometimes viewed with suspicion by their neighbours. Doubly discriminated against, it is hardly surprising to learn that this tiny group – less than 2% of the local Palestinian population – is particularly marginalised.

All Palestinians have the right to fair and fair-minded treatment from their peers and from the recognised authorities alike. Religious extremism of any kind, implicated in attacks, abuse and harassment of Christians in the area around Bethlehem recently, is not to be tolerated. No matter who is targeted by violence and bigotry, such acts are a stain on the conscience of peoples. It is thus the hope of my delegation that solutions will be found by local leaderships which will address the needs of all the members of local communities who suffer from violence.

Moreover, of ongoing concern is the security wall which cuts access to some Palestinians' lands and water sources, as well as to employment, commerce, education, medical care and freedom of worship. My delegation freely acknowledges the right of all peoples to live in peace and security; on the other hand, we believe that the Holy Land is in greater need of bridges than of walls.

In the hope that the many problems of the region will be resolved by negotiation and dialogue, my delegation underlines that a lasting solution will include the question of the Holy City of Jerusalem. In light of the numerous incidents of violence and the challenge to free movement posed by the security wall, the Holy See renews its support for "...internationally guaranteed provisions to ensure the freedom of religion and of conscience of its inhabitants, as well as permanent, free and unhindered access to the Holy Places by the faithful of all religions and nationalities" (A/RES/ES-10/2).

Jerusalem is the acknowledged home of the three Abrahamic faiths, and whoever has custody of the Holy City has a particular responsibility for it before the international community. Borrowing the recent words of Pope Benedict XVI, we hope that Jerusalem will one day be “a home of harmony and peace” for all believers.

The time is long overdue for fraternal, open dialogue in order to bring about the birth of two states, side by side, mutually respecting each other’s right to exist and prosper. There have already been far too many innocent victims, be they Israeli or Palestinian, Jews, Christians and Moslems alike. Only with a just and lasting peace – not imposed, but secured through negotiation – will the legitimate aspirations of all the peoples of the Holy Land be fulfilled.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.