

Intervention of H.E. Archbishop Francis A. Chullikatt
Apostolic Nuncio and Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations
Eleventh Session of the Open Working Group
on the Sustainable Development Goals
Focus Area 5: “Gender equality and women’s empowerment”
New York, 6 May 2014

Mr. Co-Chair,

At the outset let me commend you and your co-Chair for the way you are steering the work of this Open Working Group.

My Delegation agrees with the frequent reaffirmations in this Open Working Group that the formulation of the post-2015 development agenda must be based on the Rio+20 outcome document, “*The Future We Want*”, and should build upon the achievements in the Millennium Development Goals.

Mr. Co-Chair,

The proposed approach to Focus Area 5 places significant attention on the inherent rights of women and girls through elements firmly founded in internationally acclaimed universal human rights. To this end, we fully support every effort to end the scourges of violence, of child and forced marriage, and of discrimination, and commitments to achieve equal access to education and employment opportunities, access to and control of assets and resources, greater participation and leadership, and address of unpaid care work. Here my Delegation once again underscores the critical synergies healthy families provide as an enabling environment for every proposed target, and encourages elements leveraging this potential.

Mr. Co-Chair,

With regard to proposals *a* and *b*, my Delegation hopes that the commitment as set out in the document to end all forms of violence and discrimination against women and girls could be achieved even before the proposed target date of 2030. Women and children must always have their rights and personal security protected at every moment of their lives.

With regard to proposal *i*, my Delegation considers it necessary to remind this Open Working Group — which finds its own *raison d'être* in Rio+20 — that the carefully negotiated outcome of that International Conference makes no mention whatsoever of the so-called reproductive rights. These were proposed, in fact, at Rio itself; there was no consensus in the international community, however, on their inclusion in a universal development agenda, and they were expressly excluded. For a large number of countries, “reproductive health” and “reproductive rights” agenda infringes on their national sovereignty in the politically and morally fraught question of abortion. In this regard my delegation would find problematic the inclusion of Target *i* of Focus Area 5 and of Target *f* of Focus Area 3. In light of the above, Mr. Co-Chair, it is not fitting that the Open Working Group overrule in this forum what was already decided in the forum from which it takes its mandate and legitimacy.

It is also necessary to point out that the “reproductive rights” agenda, which has often been interpreted as promoting abortion and which the Rio+20 Outcome abjured, subsumes an act which affronts internationally recognized fundamental human rights of women and children, including the right to life, and its corollary freedom from violence. For this reason, it would appear incongruous that measures infringing these rights would find standing in the coherent, rights-based, universally applicable approach to sustainable development that we all seek.

Mr. Co-Chair,

In alignment with the Rio+20 outcome, my Delegation therefore would support language under Focus Area 5 on improving the nutrition of women (and their children) in the first 1,000 days between a woman’s pregnancy and her child’s second birthday, to ensure women’s health and safeguard her maternity in this critical period.¹ A focus upon this need, particular to women in one of her their most vulnerable stages, is as integral to a rights-based development strategy advancing women’s dignity as it is replete with crosscutting interlinkages.

Thank you, Mr. Co-Chair.

¹¹ See TST Issue Brief: Food Security and Nutrition, pp.2,6.