

FEATURE: Diplomacy of the conscience – The Holy See at the United Nations

7 February 2017 – Ever since 1964, when it was informally accepted to the United Nations General Assembly, the Holy See has had a permanent seat at international discussions and used its observer status to go on record about matters of peace and human dignity.

“We consider the United Nations not only important but in itself very useful for humanity,” Archbishop Bernardito Auza, Apostolic Nuncio and Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations, told *UN News*.

He went on to say: “The Holy See, the Catholic Church itself, appreciates and considers the United Nations a very important institution for all the nations to come together and discuss problems and even enjoy together what is common.”

The priorities of the Holy See for the year are similar to key UN goals – among them, the quest for peace, providing assistance to migrants and refugees, and nuclear disarmament.

The Holy See is a nearly 2,000-year old term that refers to the international sovereignty of the Pope, or leader of the Roman Catholic Church. The Vatican City State is the geographic property that ensures that sovereignty.

This makes the Holy See the only religious entity represented among the 193 UN Member States and Palestine, the other non-member observer state.

What’s more, in a diplomatic world where Member States wrangle for a seat on the Security Council or a senior UN job, the Holy See turned down an opportunity for GA Membership in 2004, when Switzerland, the only other Permanent Observer state at that time, gained full membership.

“That was a very hard decision to make. Saint John Paul II was already very sick at the time, in 2004. I remember very well. It was he himself who took the decision that we should remain as a Permanent Observer state,” the Archbishop recalled. “The fundamental reason is that so that we could remain neutral.”

Holy See: We consider the UN in itself “very useful for humanity” –
Archbishop Bernardito Auza

Religion as justification for killing

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, when President Joseph Kabila refused to step down after his second term expired on 19 December 2016, people took to the streets. The demonstrations turned violent.

On New Year's Eve, political leaders reached an agreement – mediated by the Catholic Church, specifically by the National Episcopal Conference of Congo (CENCO) – under which presidential elections would be held by the end of 2017, and President Kabila would relinquish control. If successful, this would be the country's first peaceful transition of power since its independence in 1960.



Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo (CENCO) leads mediation at the signing on 31 December. Photo: MONUSCO/John Bompengo

“The United Nations has been very appreciative of what the Bishops were able to achieve,” Archbishop Auza said, adding that bringing the parties together and mediating avoided “chaos and possible bloodshed in the whole country.”

The Holy See is also active in helping to resolve conflicts in Colombia and Venezuela, where Pope Francis was asked to help mediate in difficult political situations, the Archbishop said.

In Burundi, Mozambique and the Philippines, the Church is active mediating conflicts that pit different religious groups against each other: “The Catholic Church is playing a major role in trying to remedy the impression that religion is a cause of all these conflicts, and also to help other religious leaders understand that their role is very important in trying to prevent wars, conflicts or violence.”

Within the UN, the Holy See delivers its messages by addressing the Security Council, the General Assembly and at special events.

For example, in 2014, the Security Council adopted resolution 2178, condemning violent extremism and urging measures preventing travel related to and support for the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and other foreign terrorist fighters. Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Holy See's Secretary of State, told the Council at the time that in order to counter terrorism, people and countries must achieve social justice for all and mutual cultural understanding.



During a visit in 2008, His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI touches the United Nations flag removed from the ruins of the United Nations Headquarters in Baghdad during the 2001 bombing attack, in remembrance of the injured and those who died. UN Photo/Evan Schneider

“The Holy See – which is a sovereign international subject that also represents a world faith community – affirms that people of faith have a grave responsibility to condemn those who seek to detach faith from reason and ‘instrumentalize’ faith as a justification for violence,” Cardinal Parolin said.

Member States of the General Assembly understand the importance of working with religious leaders on international issues. In 2010, the Assembly designated the first week of February every year as World Interfaith Harmony Week. It aims to spread “the message of interfaith harmony and goodwill in the world’s churches, mosques, synagogues, temples and other places of worship during that week, based on love of God and love of one’s neighbour or on love of the good and love of one’s neighbour, each according to their own religious traditions or conviction.”

According to Assembly resolution A/RES/65/5, Member States recognize that the moral imperatives of all religions, convictions and beliefs call for “peace, tolerance and mutual understanding.”

Committing to nuclear disarmament in good faith

The Holy See has voiced deep concern about the violent use of atomic energy since 1943. Watch Archbishop Auza’s call for nuclear disarmament.

Archbishop Bernardito Auza of the Holy See: Nuclear disarmament is one of the priorities for the year

The tight rope of forced migration

Arguably, no issue has been more polarizing in recent years as the movement of migrants and refugees. Around the world, more than 65 million people are displaced – the greatest number since the Second World War. A record number of migrants and refugees died in the Mediterranean Sea just this winter, the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) announced on Friday.

Archbishop Auza expressed great concern about people forced to flee their homes and about how “societies or nations will just close their eyes or borders to them without doing anything.”



In the first official visit of a Vatican representative to United Nations Headquarters, Archbishop Amleto Giovanni Cicognani, signed the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. The Holy See was the 17th signatory to the convention, which was adopted in July 1951 by a plenipotentiary conference convened at the direction of the General Assembly. Pictured, Archbishop Cicognani (left) with UN Secretary-General Trygve Lie. UN Photo/MB

“The Holy Father explicitly asked me while I was in Rome last month actively to engage in the coming inter-governmental negotiations towards a global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration,” the Archbishop said of the international agreement expected to be adopted in 2018, which will set out a range of common principles and agreements among Member States on international migration.

The compact was launched with the adoption of the New York Declaration for

Refugees and Migrants by a UN summit on 19 September 2016. The next discussions are expected to be held in March in Geneva as part of the UN International Organization for Migration's (IOM) International Dialogue on Migration.

Seasoned in diplomacy, the Holy See is aware of the issues surrounding migration and the challenges some Member States have in aiding refugees and migrants.

"It's sad that we are noticing a rise in a certain type of nationalism – even a certain xenophobia," Archbishop Auza said, adding that migration "is also being used as a tool for some political parties to gain power."



Participants at a special event on ending human trafficking, organized by the Permanent Mission of the Holy See and the Santa Marta Group. Ending human trafficking and all other forms of slavery is a key priority for the Holy See. UN Photo/Loey Felipe

"We understand that migration has negative aspects. As the Holy Father has said, I also appeal to the migrants to respect the cultures and the lives and society of those people who receive them. So it is two-way traffic," he added.

On issues of migration, as with any other issue, the Holy See offers Member States "orientation and spiritual inspiration," as stated on the Holy See Mission's website, as opposed to political support or material aid.

"Simply because we may not agree on a particular issue, we do not disrespect one another," the Archbishop said of working with Member States, the UN Secretariat and its agencies. "We continue to work together. We continue to be friends. We continue to collaborate while respecting and acknowledging the differences."

This story is part of a feature series that examines the roles that world religions have at the United Nations and in international diplomacy.

[Speech: Fire service reform must go further and faster: article by Brandon Lewis](#)

Last month I visited the firefighters working in gold commands in Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk responding to the flooding threats on the east coast. As always, they showed the utmost professionalism in their roles and again

highlighted how dedicated our firefighters are to protecting and serving communities in their wide-ranging roles. The Prime Minister delivered radical and ambitious reforms in policing while she was Home Secretary. Last May she set out an equally ambitious reform programme for the fire service.

The aim was clear: to make the fire service more accountable, efficient and professional than ever before – so we can better protect the public. I am pleased that these reforms were met with genuine optimism from a sector which knows it must modernise to meet the changing demands upon it.

While we have been laying the groundwork for this in the last 6 months, 2017 will be the year when we see real change. Today I will update the fire service on the next stage of fire reform.

Progress has been made, but I want to us to go further and faster.

That is why I'm going to introduce independent inspection, which, for the first time, will consider the operational effectiveness of each service. This independent scrutiny will ensure fire services are held to the highest possible standards. It will bring an end to the current peer review process through which, in practice, chief fire officers handpick their own reviewer, set their own terms of reference, and decide whether or not to publish the results.

[The Prime Minister described the practice in her speech last May](#) as 'not so much marking your own homework as setting your own exam paper and resolving that you've passed'. It has to change.

I also want to further professionalise the service and to make sure that all fire personnel are offered opportunities to enhance their skills so they are equipped with the knowledge they need to provide the best possible services to their communities.

Our workforce must better represent the communities it serves. I expect services to find solutions to the current lack of diversity so clearly highlighted in the statistics we published last year, with just 4% of the workforce from an ethnic minority background and just 5% female. We can, and must, do better.

I also want to see services collaborate further in more innovative ways. Better joint working can strengthen our emergency services, deliver significant savings to the taxpayer and – most importantly – enable them to better protect the public. Last week, the [Policing and Crime Act](#) received Royal Assent, giving the fire service the legislative platform it needs to seize collaboration opportunities.

A new duty requiring the emergency services to keep collaboration opportunities under review and to take on collaboration opportunities where it would be in the interests of efficiency and effectiveness to do so, will come into force in April. Police and crime commissioners will be able to make a local case to take on responsibility for governance of fire and rescue services, to maximise the benefits of joint working.

To ensure the public have trust in how the service is performing, services must also be more transparent. Last year, [data published for the first time by this government](#) highlighted stark differences between what different fire and rescue services were paying for similar items of uniform and kit. For example, prices that authorities pay for breathing kit were shown to range from £328 to £1,504.

That is why in 2017 we will collect and publish even more information to allow the public to compare whether their service is getting the best value for money. Services must work together much more closely to improve how they buy their kit and on what they pay for things like training and buildings, to drive down costs and maximise savings. This will demonstrate how local government can deliver sensible savings, whilst protecting frontline services and keeping council tax down.

Delivering this ambitious reform agenda does not simply rest with me, or with the government. Ultimately, the fire service itself must shape and deliver these changes. It is for their benefit and the benefit of the communities they serve, and I look forward to seeing the results.

[This is a significant victory for Parliament, and follows months of concerted pressure from Labour – Starmer](#)

Commenting

on the Government's concession regarding a meaningful vote in Parliament on a final deal to leave the EU, **Keir Starmer, Labour's Shadow Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union** said:

"This is a significant victory for Parliament, and follows months of concerted pressure from Labour.

"Labour has repeatedly said that Parliament must have a meaningful vote on any final Brexit deal – that means MPs are able to vote on the final deal before it is concluded; that the Commons has a debate and vote before the European Parliament does; and that the vote will cover withdrawal from the EU as well as our future relationship with the EU.

"This

eleventh hour concession is therefore welcome, but it needs to be firmed up as the Bill progresses through both Houses.”

[News story: Civil news: delivery of family mediation work from 2018](#)

From:

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Headline intentions document covering mediation work from 2018 published on 7 February 2017.

Our approach to family mediation work from 1 April 2018 is set out in a headline intentions document which is now available – see link below.

The previously published headline intentions document for all other areas of civil legal aid work confirmed that existing family mediation contracts will end on 31 March 2018. This was made available on 20 January 2017 – see link below.

We also explained on 20 January that we would separately publish information giving further details about the way ahead for family mediation work.

The intention is for the delivery of family mediation services to operate under the new 2018 Standard Civil Contract from 1 April 2018.

When will the tender open?

A tender process for these contracts will open in April 2017. All organisations must successfully tender for a contract if they wish to deliver legally aided mediation services from 1 April 2018.

Service delivery remains similar

The government remains committed to family mediation as a key route to helping family disputes avoid court proceedings. So, we will not be making significant changes to the delivery of family mediation services when compared with current contracts.

Quality assurance

We will maintain the quality of mediation services under current contracts

but will no longer require family mediation providers to hold the Mediation Quality Mark (MQM).

Instead, the contract will include the key quality standards set out in MQM and will require that mediators and mediation organisations meet the standards set out by the:

- Family Mediation Council
- Family Mediation Standards Board

Further details are provided in the mediation headline intentions document.

Further information

[Civil 2018 contracts tender](#) – to download mediation-specific headline intentions document and headline intentions document for all other areas of civil work

“Brexit and independence are two sides of the same coin”

7 February 2017

Speaking in a debate in the Scottish Parliament today, Scottish Labour leader Kezia Dugdale said that Brexit and independence are two sides of the same coin. Here is the full text of Kez’s speech:

I welcome the chance to speak in today’s debate.

It’s important that this chamber makes its voice heard, although we must accept that ultimately it is for the UK Parliament to have the final say.

Those on the SNP’s benches may not like that, but people in Scotland voted to remain part of the UK and that should be respected.

Labour’s amendment accepts that the UK is leaving the European Union.

There was a UK-wide vote and those of us who backed remain lost.

The strength of our democracy rests on our respect for the will of the people.

Now I am not happy about the result.

I fear what will happen to our nation.

I fear what will happen to EU nationals who have made Britain their home, but

who have yet to receive any reassurances about their future.

I fear the impact Brexit will have on our economy, on jobs and on our public finances.

So while I accept that the UK is leaving the European Union, I do not accept the terms Theresa May has set out.

And that's why I don't believe article 50 should be triggered right now.

Not when the Tories seem determined to deliver a settlement that will do incalculable damage to the country.

I cannot and will not sign up to Theresa May's vision of Brexit.

Leave voters didn't back Brexit to make themselves poorer.

But that is exactly what will happen under the current plans.

Presiding Officer, I want to address another part of our amendment.

That's the section on SNP plans for another independence referendum.

The only thing worse than Brexit for Scottish jobs and the economy would be independence.

The SNP government's own figures show that being part of the UK is even more important to Scotland than remaining in the EU.

The economic links built up during our 300 year Union are deep and of great benefit to Scotland.

On trade, currency, jobs and so much more – together we are stronger.

As our amendment makes clear, Labour will not support any SNP plan to impose another independence referendum on the people of Scotland.

Our nation is divided enough.

Another referendum would do irreparable damage to the very fabric of communities across Scotland.

The message from a clear majority in September 2014 was that we should remain in the UK.

And the SNP should respect that.

But the reality is that the SNP has only been given the excuse to seek another referendum because of the mess the Conservatives have made of this whole process.

Ruth Davidson never fails to try and tell us that the Union is safe in Conservative hands.

She spends her days straddling tanks and waving a Union flag just to emphasise the security of the realm.

Meanwhile the actions of her own government have exploited the insecurities people feel in their own lives and reopened the divides of the last referendum, despite their apparent willingness to move on from it.

Yet let's look at how the Conservatives have behaved since the independence referendum in 2014.

We had David Cameron's half-baked English votes for English laws plans.

Playing straight into the hands of the Nationalists.

Then there was the 2015 General Election campaign, fully signed up to by Ruth Davidson, which sought to divide our country further by setting Scotland against England.

A gift to the SNP.

And now we have Brexit.

The EU referendum was a device designed entirely to appease the right wing of the Conservative Party.

Instead of standing his ground, David Cameron capitulated in the hope of buying off a few UKIP votes and the applause of people like David Davis and Liam Fox.

I haven't got time to do to go into the detail of Tory attacks on social security and there multiple attempts to undermine workers' rights – again pouring petrol on the fire for independence.

Time and again the Conservative and Unionist Party has put Scotland's place in the UK at risk.

And yet the Tories have the brass neck to come to this place and claim to be the party of the Union.

Ruth Davidson now finds herself voting for something she knows will damage the UK economy and Scottish job prospects – issues she claimed UK-wide plaudits for following the TV debates.

She does so without a word of regret.

And we wonder why faith in politics and politicians is so low.

I want to conclude, Presiding Officer, by saying this.

I voted to remain in the EU last year for many of the same reasons I voted to stay in the UK in 2014.

Because I reject a narrow nationalist view of the world.

The view that blames something or someone else for our country's problems – whether that's England or Westminster, immigrants or the EU.

Nationalism, an ideology on the rise the world over, is about breaking apart and creating division.

Brexit and independence are two sides of the same coin.

I believe in working together.

In solidarity with our friends and neighbours.

I believe that we can achieve more together than we ever could apart.

I believe in pooling and sharing resources.

Whether that's with the EU to tackle climate change, the refugee crisis or international terrorism.

Or whether that's with the rest of the UK to fund our public services, pay pensions or to grow our economy.

That's what Labour's amendment calls for and I urge members to back it.