

Holy See
Statement delivered in response to the report of the Special Rapporteur on
counter-terrorism, Martin Scheinin
Third Committee of the UN General Assembly

26 October 2009

Mr. Chairman,

As we continue to see around the world, the criminal, dehumanizing and murderous goals of terrorism serve only to destroy cooperation, understanding and respect among persons. As the Note of the Special Rapporteur indicates, in many corners of the globe, women and men continue to be subjected to discrimination and face violence or threats of violence by the illicit use of power. These violations must be addressed if we are effectively to replace efforts to divide the human family with respect for the dignity of each and every person.

My delegation expresses concern with the presumption in the Note that gender is a social construct which does not refer to men and women but “encompasses the social constructions that underlie how their roles, functions, and responsibilities” are defined and understood.

As we have expressed in previous international fora, my delegation understands the word “gender” according to the ordinary usage in the United Nations context, that is, with the common meaning of that word, in languages where it exists, namely, that gender is grounded in biological sexual identity, male or female. This is also consistent with the way in which the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court as well as the outcome document of the Beijing Platform for Action refers to the term.

While my delegation does not share a biological determinist view that male and female roles are biologically determined and static, we also cannot accept the notion that sexual identity can be adapted indefinitely to suit new and different purposes. Instead, my delegation recognizes the natural distinctiveness and complementarity of women and men as mutually beneficial characteristics, as long as such diversity is not a result of an arbitrary imposition, to support and promote the inherent rights and dignity of both sexes.

The insistence in the Note that gender is a “social and shifting construct”, “changeable over time and across cultures” does not serve at all the cause of anti-

terrorism; on the contrary, it weakens it by dividing women and men into more and ever changing categories. Instead what is needed is the affirmation of all persons regardless and not because of their differences, for each and every person has value and dignity.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman