

Vatican official urges corporate responsibility, protection of women

VATICAN CITY - Multinational corporations have often ignored human rights, environmental regulations and labor laws in their business practices around the world, causing “exceptional damage” in underdeveloped countries, a Vatican official said.

Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, the Vatican’s representative to United Nations organizations in Geneva, urged greater attention to human rights by all players involved in business in a speech June 3 at the United Nations Human Rights Council.

He urged the implementation of the U.N. “Protect, Respect and Remedy” Framework aimed at creating standards that companies will be expected to respect and host countries to monitor and enforce.

The focus, he said, is to prevent human rights violations in the first place.

Until now, however, many transnational corporations have deprived their workers of a living wage, forced children into labor, ignored safety and security measures, operated without regard for the rights of indigenous communities and endangered the water, food and livelihoods of local people, Archbishop Tomasi said.

Because of the size and reach of many multinational companies and their influence on millions of people around the world, the archbishop said, their responsibility in promoting human rights in less-developed countries is “urgent and essential.”

The framework also makes local and state authorities responsible for demanding ethical behavior and respect for the communities where businesses operate, the archbishop said. The multi-pronged approach engages corporate leaders, workers, managers, local and state political figures and international organizations in pursuing these goals, he said.

Archbishop Tomasi also spoke to the council about the need to address the “tragic reality” of violence against women, including rape as a weapon of war, trafficking of women for purposes of sex and cheap labor, abuse of domestic workers, kidnapping

and forced religious conversions.

“Violence occurs more frequently where poverty and social instability are prevalent,” the archbishop said, adding that some legal systems and local traditions are still bound by a culture of negative and unequal treatment of women.

“There is still a long way to go in order to prevent violence against women and girls and to achieve effective equality everywhere,” he said. The root problem, he said, “is a view of women that ignores or rejects their equal dignity.”

Archbishop Tomasi made his remarks in response to a presentation on violence against women. He said that it is a phenomenon that must be understood within the surrounding context and that improved standards of living and equal access to education can help prevent acts of violence.