

Vatican rep says U.N. has obligation to do more to help world's poor

UNITED NATIONS – The United Nations must fulfill its responsibilities to address extreme poverty, said the Vatican's new representative to the United Nations.

Archbishop Francis Chullikatt said Oct. 5 that although the global financial and economic crisis has shown signs of recovery, “many of the poorest within society remain outside the benefits of this recovery with an additional 64 million people falling into extreme poverty by the end of this year.”

“This challenge presents a need for new focus by the international community to return to authentic humanitarian programs and financial systems which place the person at its center rather than at its service,” he said.

The archbishop, named to the post in July, delivered the statement to a session of the General Assembly that was addressing a report on the work of the world body.

Focusing on military expenses around the world, he called the \$1.3 trillion spent in 2007 for arms and other military expenditures particularly troubling in light of the fact that more than 1.4 billion people around the world live on less than \$1.25 per day.

“This never-ending ability to find funds for military programs highlights yet again the need for individuals and governmental leaders to refocus their priorities and financial commitments,” he said.

Archbishop Chullikatt noted that issues facing the world's poor – such as lack of education and access to clean drinking water and sanitation – have not been met

“even though the capacity to provide remains within our grasp.”

The way to meet such needs, he said, requires a shift in how money is spent and moving “financial resources from military programs to those which seek long term sustainable development.”

“While the challenge is real, it is not an insurmountable obstacle if nations move resources from programs designed to destroy to those which foster life and development,” he emphasized.

Archbishop Chullikatt said the promotion of human and economic development specifically requires a commitment to the “fundamental right to life.” He said health services which fail to recognize the right to life and the right to raise a family “undermine the inherent dignity of the human person.”

“Concepts of reproductive health and sexual rights which incorporate access to abortion or other forms of life-destroying services or research foster the flawed logic of a culture of death instead of one which respects and embraces life and a better more sustainable future,” he said.

The archbishop also said advocacy for human rights must recognize the “inherent social and spiritual nature of the human person and respect the rights of individuals to practice freely one’s faith.”

“Religious freedom encompasses more than the mere toleration of religion or religious beliefs but also requires the freedom to worship and express one’s faith publicly within society,” he added, stressing that “religious intolerance and violence in the name of religion or in the name of God must be condemned.”

Archbishop Chullikatt credited the United Nations for its work in fostering development and greater peace and security around the world but said the world

body could do much more to respond to future needs.

He praised the United Nations for its response to humanitarian emergencies, progress on nuclear disarmament and the start of negotiations on an arms trade treaty, but he also pointed out areas where its work fell short such as: failing to fully address climate change, lagging global financial recovery, nuclear proliferation and ongoing violence in many corners of the world.

He said the Holy See “reiterates its commitment to the principles and ideals which founded the United Nations” and would continue to help the world body in its mission to “serve as a sign of unity between states and an instrument of service to the entire human family.”