

Violating human dignity is root of all conflict, says Vatican official

VATICAN CITY - Not respecting human dignity lies at the root of all conflict, including the renewed violence in the Gaza Strip, said a top Vatican official and longtime diplomat.

Religious tensions play a minor role in fueling world conflicts; rather, countless economic and social injustices are what foment violence, said Cardinal Renato Martino, head of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace.

“For decades, human dignity has been trampled in the Gaza Strip; hatred and homicidal fundamentalism find fodder” in social and economic injustice, he said in an interview published in the Vatican’s newspaper, L’Osservatore Romano, Jan. 1.

He said the use of arms in the Middle East must stop because “dialogue is the only possible way to bring peace” in the Holy Land.

The “fresh, ferocious outbreak of violence” and renewed military action in Gaza will not break the cycle of attacks and reprisals in the Holy Land, he said.

“The current excessive imbalance between military spending and development aid - (which) exists everywhere, including the Gaza Strip - shows a deep distrust in the power of dialogue, a deep distrust in the human being,” said the cardinal. Only dialogue can end the world’s conflicts, he added.

But talks must include rectifying long-standing injustices, he said.

The international community, diplomats and local governments must remember that “the source of every conflict, not to mention the degradation of the environment and the social and economic injustices” that trigger the many crises plaguing communities today, is “contempt for, neglect of, or only partial agreement with the principle of respect for human dignity,” he said.

In the article that appeared in the Vatican newspaper’s first issue of 2009, Cardinal

Martino assessed a variety of world events and issues that attracted the attention of the Vatican in 2008.

He said the scandal of hunger in the world continues to be of concern.

Famine and lack of nutrition are to be blamed on the poor distribution of plentiful foodstuffs, not overpopulation, he said.

The responsibility for the food crisis “is in the hands of unscrupulous people who focus only on profit and certainly not on the well-being of all people,” said Cardinal Martino.

A more just system of distribution and not the manufacturing of genetically modified foods is the key to addressing the problem, he said.

“If one wants to pursue GMOs (genetically modified organisms) one can freely do so, but without hiding that it’s a way to make more profits,” he said.

Utilizing genetically modified foods calls for “prudence” because genetically modifying organisms can increase yields in some instances, he said, but people must not abuse their power to be able to manipulate nature.

Cardinal Martino also commented on the Vatican’s opposition to a nonbinding declaration brought before the U.N. General Assembly in December to endorse the universal decriminalization of homosexuality.

He said the church is strongly opposed to any laws that criminalize homosexuality.

However, the Vatican noted that the way the resolution was written could open the way to the recognition of same-sex marriages and could limit the right of the Catholic Church and other religious bodies to teach that while homosexual behavior is not a criminal offense it is not morally acceptable.

Cardinal Martino said same-sex couples “can do what they want, but don’t claim (same-sex unions) are equal” to marriage between a man and a woman.

“We received the precious gift of freedom from God, even the freedom to choose to sin or not,” he said.

He said instead of trying to insert new categories needing human rights protections people should focus their energy on guaranteeing respect for all the rights that were agreed upon 60 years ago and are still violated in many nations.