



Agenda item: 7

General Debate

Statement by:

Holy See





Statement of the Very Reverend Monsignor Daniel Pachó,
Under-Secretary for Multilateral Affairs of the Section for Relations with States and
International Organizations of the Secretariat of State,
**at the XVI Ministerial Conference of the United Nations Trade and Development
(UNCTAD)**
Geneva, 20-23 October 2025

Mr. President,

The Holy See is pleased to participate in this 16th UNCTAD Ministerial Conference, kindly hosted by the Government of Switzerland and the City of Geneva.

In the current crisis facing the multilateral system, it is essential that a response of hope, which is characterised by moral courage and the decision to take a different direction, is found. In this context, the theme of this Conference, “Shaping the Future: Driving Economic Transformation for Equitable, Inclusive and Sustainable Development,” is an eloquent expression of that same conviction. Therefore, the Holy See would like to offer a brief reflection on how this theme embodies the spirit of hope.

The first word that stands out is “future”. The international community has come together for this Conference with the aim of achieving a tangible and ambitious outcome as a statement of confidence in what lies ahead. The future is not just something to be waited for; it is something to be built now with vision and resolute persistence.

The second word is “transformation”. Every effort must be made to overcome the global inequalities that create deep rifts between continents, countries, and societies.¹ Such disparities endanger the future. Decisive action, driven by justice and strengthened by solidarity, is required.

Finally, “development”. While there is a general concern about the direction in which the world is heading, it is nevertheless vital to maintain hope and continue to strive for authentic human flourishing and a development that is not just economic, but truly integral. This means development that puts the human person at its center, respecting its God-given dignity and advances the common good by integrating the economic, social, cultural, moral, and spiritual dimensions of well-being.

In this perspective, the work of UNCTAD, through its three pillars, stands as a beacon of hope: hope that solidarity and responsibility may transform the future, and that every person, especially the poorest, may take part in a development that is just, integral, and truly human.

Mr. President,

¹ Cfr. Pope Leo XIV, *Address to the Members of the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See*, 16 May 2025.

In this spirit of hope, the Holy See wishes to draw attention to key areas that call for our common commitment to advancing authentic integral development.

Development cannot be reduced to mere figures and indicators. Above all, it is about people, especially those living in poverty and in dire need. Their dignity must be upheld, “and the extreme poverty of all those to whom this dignity is denied should constantly weigh upon our consciences”.²

When development loses sight of the human person, it inevitably descends into crisis. The international community is currently facing precisely such a crisis: growth without equity, progress without inclusion, and wealth without true prosperity. Therefore, as Pope Leo XIV exhorts, “[w]e need to be increasingly committed to resolving the structural causes of poverty.”³

“One of the most striking aspects of development in the present day is the important question of respect for life, which cannot in any way be detached from questions concerning the development of peoples.”⁴ Openness to life and respect for its sacredness are at the centre of true development.

Another important condition for integral human development is religious freedom. Although religious extremism can sometimes hinder the exercise of the right to religious freedom, intentionally spreading religious indifference or practical atheism by countries also creates obstacles to true human development. Such actions deprive societies of vital spiritual and human resources. As Pope Benedict XVI said, “God is the guarantor of man’s true development, inasmuch as, having created him in his image, he also establishes the transcendent dignity of men and women and feeds their innate yearning to ‘be more’.”⁵

Furthermore, the development crisis runs deep, affecting even the very structures intended to promote development, including the existing international financial architecture, which too often struggles to address the current challenges.

The difficulties to achieve sustainable development can also be tied to the debt crisis. Moreover, debt burdens trap developing countries in poverty. Besides the staggering debt levels, it is unacceptable that interest payments are outpacing critical public expenditure: a total of 3.4 billion people currently live in countries that spend more on servicing debt than on health or education.⁶ Loans, originally intended as instruments of growth, have, in many cases, become a stifling burden that drains hope from future generations.

Another aspect of this same reality is the ecological debt. This stems from commercial imbalances that degrade the environment, as well as from the disproportionate use of natural resources, by certain countries, over long periods of time.⁷ Therefore, in this Jubilee year that is being celebrated by the Catholic Church, the Holy See appeals “to the most affluent nations

² Pope Leo XIV, Apostolic Exhortation *Dilexi Te*, n. 92.

³ *Ibidem*, n. 94.

⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 28.

⁵ *Ibidem*, n. 29.

⁶ Cfr. United Nations Trade and Development (UNCTAD), *A World of Debt Report 2025*, p. 21.

⁷ Cfr. Pope Francis, Bull of Indiction of the Ordinary Jubilee of the Year 2025 *Spes non confundit*, n. 16.

[...] to acknowledge the gravity of so many of their past decisions and determine to *forgive the debts* of countries that will never be able to repay them. More than a question of generosity, this is a matter of justice.”⁸

The rapid rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) reveals another frontier of the current development crisis. While AI has the potential to advance sustainable development, it also requires responsibility, discernment, ethical management and regulatory frameworks centred on the human person.⁹ It is crucial that “its employment does not undermine the [...] dignity of the human person,”¹⁰ nor allow automatism and simulation to replace it.¹¹

Mr. President,

In conclusion, the Holy See remains confident that when the international community acts together with vision and determination, what appears as a crisis becomes an opportunity to build a more fraternal and sustainable future in which every human being can flourish with dignity.

Thank you.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Cfr. Message of Pope Leo XIV, *Message on the occasion of the AI for Good Summit, signed by the Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin*, 10 July 2025.

¹⁰ Pope Leo XIV, *Address to the Members of the International Inter-Parliamentary Union*, 21 June 2025.

¹¹ Cfr. Pope Leo XIV, *Address to the Italian Episcopal Conference*, 17 June 2025.