

SUITABLE COMITY ON THE RIGHTS OF DISABLED PEOPLE.

STRASBOURG –OCTOBER 5-7TH 2016

- I- Transcript of the intervention of the delegate for the Holy See on point 6 on the agenda (brainstorming session on “*Inclusive education and disability in relation to the training of professionals on Human Rights*”)

I would like to speak on the training of professionals and the way they could be accompanied. The question that each of our States should raise is: “What can we tell those whose jobs lead them to take care of people with a disability?”.

One of the speakers in the brainstorming session offered this very relevant suggestion that we should change our hard drive when talking about disability. I believe that beyond the technical suggestions that have been quoted, we should put forward 2 elements as regards inclusive education on an anthropological level, which would be likely to reassure and strengthen the professionals: one of them relates to prejudices, which many of you have referred to (1), the second one relates to the very nature of their job (2).

- 1) First, the necessity to go beyond prejudices, fears, doubts and misunderstandings must be relentlessly reminded.

In that purpose, it is our duty to warn professionals – even if also true for each one of us – about two natural likings in our societies and States:

- The first one consists in taking into account only the inabilities of those with a disability or a visible weakness. On the contrary we must make sure that we rely on their abilities. Whatever their handicaps, everybody has a double ability: first an ability to make - and generally more than expected or believed - and more especially, an ability to “be”, and in that matter disabled people are often more gifted than many well and able people! Let us be able to admit it and whenever possible, *let us bet on people’s abilities rather than limits*.
- The second pitfall that needs to be avoided consists in comprehending the person with a disability in terms of uselessness, constraints and costs (including in our public policies!).

It cannot be denied that there are big difficulties but it is also true that *disabled people can be apprehended through their fecundity and richness*. They all have much to offer, bring and reveal to the society they belong to: for example, the essential importance of *gratuitousness*, which many of our countries have forgotten; or that in life there are things that are more worthwhile than others and that *not everything is essential or necessary*; that accompanying someone with a weakness *often makes us capable of greater, more beautiful and amazing things* than we had expected; that someone’s love, which everybody needs and which everybody is capable of, may be an astounding lever on which professionals should be invited to rely on.

- 2) It is also essential to tell professionals again and again how great their job and mission are.

In our countries, the jobs related to disability issues are often depreciated; they suffer from a lack of esteem and recognition, and they are often ridden with doubt and weariness; all of which sometimes – often – result in a temptation for discouragement and routine.

We must tell the professionals – and thank them for this – that *their trade is at the core of the most fundamental issues of our so-called “developed” societies*, for disabled people make us ask ourselves 3 questions that are at the core of these professionals’ everyday jobs but also the reason to be of our Comity (and which every public decision-maker should ask themselves):

- First question: what is a human-being? In our Comity, we talk much about “Human Rights”, and this is a positioning that we must pay tribute to. In this important debate, those whose job consists in accompanying fragile people are better qualified than anyone else to testify of the greatness and dignity of any person beyond their weaknesses or handicaps.
- Second question: what makes a human-being great, beautiful and useful? The professionals working with disabled people can answer because they experience in their everyday lives as well as the parents do in their flesh that each human-being is great because no matter how serious his disability is, he/she is a man/woman, that is to say he/she is gifted for much larger things than his/her fleshy sheath or his/her intellectual quotient: beauty, joy, love or a yearning for transcendence...
- Third and last question that we can ask professionals: what makes a human-being – especially one with a disability and whom I take care of - grow? Those who accompany a disabled person can answer this question better than any of us by saying that the most important is the attention I pay him/her, the gentleness I show when taking care of him/her and the love I show him/her.

To conclude, after thanking the speakers for their relevant words, it seems to me that, as we are making the final adjustments to the project for the Strategy of the European Council for the five years to come, we should remember that before implementing techniques, skills, expertise or rights (which of course we can’t do without), the first priority towards the professionals in charge of inclusive education is to *give back some meaning to their commitment* and to show that what is at stake here is not only the dignity of disabled people but also the dignity of our 49 States.

Indeed, it is the way a nation takes care of its most fragile children, those who are “on the fringe” of society as Pope Francis has it, that enables us to assess how civilized it is. And I believe that *we all have to make progress for such an inclusion to become a reality. It depends on us*. Thank you.

II- Transcript of the intervention of the Holy-See’s delegate on the point in the agenda relating to the strategy of the European Council on disability 2017-2023.

The Strategy project that we are examining seems both very positive and constructive. The Holy-See pays tribute to the numerous improvements that have been made by the task force since the last meeting of the Comity; they side with the five orientations it contains and they are glad that this document deals both with the expansion of the rights of disabled people by our States and with the efficiency of the measures that will be taken since a system of annual follow-up has been planned for the first time.

I would only like to draw the comity’s attention on the detrimental absence in the project of a word that, to me, seems to perfectly sum up our talks, the intentions voiced by the States and the priorities conveyed in the Strategy project: the word “Welcome”.

The people with a disability, which are the reason to be of our Comity, are always worth more than their physical, mental, psychological, social or professional state. And they are also worth more than all the rights we must acknowledge them with and the actions we implement to meet their needs or situation.

Nothing is more precious than a man, a woman, a child, all the more when weaker than the others. That is the reason why what is at stake for our Comity as for each of our States – for rights, action plans and technical devices to be useful – *is to make sure that – whatever the stage of their life is – any person should be welcomed and should actually feel welcome in the society or the community they belong to.*

An editorial adjustment could thus be made in this sense in one of the paragraphs of our Strategy project. Thank you.