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DECLARATION OF OLD AGE RIGHTS

Statement made by Dr. Bramuglia before the
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When the peoples of the world embodied their politico-social aspirations in the well-known terms of the Charter of the United Nations, they simultaneously pledged themselves, not only to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, but also to re-affirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and in the equal rights of States before the law, and in particular they pledged themselves to establish conditions under which social justice might be fully realised, thereby promoting social progress and better standards of living in larger freedom for humanity

In no other document is there to be found anything to equal the scope and comprehensiveness of this noble desire of States met together in constituent assembly to endeavour to organize such international co-operation as will enable the peoples to live together in harmony and peace.

The Charter of the United Nations, though subject to the laws of evolution and change, is at present the noblest, most vital and momentous of all the documents that might serve as the abiding inspiration of international economic and social co-operation. In seeking higher standards of living, constant work for all and conditions of progress and economic-social development for humanity, the United Nations is thus accomplishing its destiny.

But alongside these questions requiring immediate attention, there exists the need to contribute to the solution of international problems of an economic, social and health character, as well as all those other related problems in the battle in defence of human interests. Hence we must work indefatigably to raise humanity above the level of the submerged, while making the necessary distinctions

between man the victim of adverse factors and circumstances, and man the servant of the community, an expression of the noblest principles.

The States here represented, assembled as they are to promote and work for these principles and their realisation, well know the value and importance of social questions, especially in these historic times when the possibility of solving all social and economic problems has become apparent.

The social question is not merely at the root of the problems bound up with poverty. Nor is it a problem of one social class. Were poverty itself to vanish from the society to which we belong; were the peoples to achieve permanent and stable betterment, and were all those other problems which affect the essential basic groups of peoples -- certainly the most numerous and nearly always the most afflicted -- to be over-come, there would still remain the urgent need to solve the problems created by wealth itself and the natural exclusiveness which is its consequence owing to its basic structure and the ordering of a world which does not evolve as swiftly as our thought. The social question is, in fact, a problem of political organization and legislation.

Thus, when we strive, through all legal institutions and processes, to achieve a society in which all men will play their part in firm co-operation, we are ensuring not only the advent of peaceful and happy times for all human beings, but also the genesis of a new man who will finally guide the footsteps of his fellows to the realms of complete emancipation.

You are not unaware of the general history and development of social legislation in the world. The protection of mankind has developed more and more everywhere. European nations have always shown themselves alive to these pre-occupations. In the East, enlightened laws are appearing, and in America a progressive institutionalism is arising in the interests of the workers, denoting a universal eagerness to save humanity from difficult living conditions when lack of physical strength, infirmity or old age appear.

The existence of these laws promulgated many years ago, and in particular since the middle of last century, is a progressive commentary on the consideration given to the rights of man and, at the same time, to the so-called right to live. And the life of a human being should assuredly enjoy all legal protections, so that

society can at no time ignore him or abandon him to chance, to suffering or to indigence.

There exists then a deep interest in social questions which has gone on increasing during these first 50 years of our century, even in the midst of the two terrible wars which humanity has had to endure; perhaps for that very reason.

This development and evolution of social rights is not an isolated fact. It is part of a movement in the world for the improvement of its social welfare systems.

It cannot be denied that the problem is world-wide. The social protection of man, sheltering him in the midst of his difficulties, in order to save him from want and to sustain him in historic dignity until the moment when his energies fail forever, is not a process peculiar to any nation in the world.

Without having to resort to history, working merely with the tools of the present, we may recall the Atlantic Charter which, though recent, already seems far away. It was stated therein that the desire was to bring about the fullest collaboration between all nations in the economic field with the object of securing for all improved labour standards, economic advancement and social security. It was drawn up at a time of violent struggle, in which vast forces were engaged. At that moment the path of future generations to social security was being mapped out in the minds of those who elaborated the Atlantic Charter.

At the same time as Canada was appointing an all-party committee to study the Marsh plan, in America the voice of a President whose name awakes grateful echoes everywhere -- Roosevelt, to whom I pay my tribute -- stated that his people wished to be protected from the evils of all forms of economic insecurity and that the protection of his fellow men should be extended to every citizen from the cradle to the grave.

Then it was Britain, ever a noble example of labour, well schooled in principles and an assiduous supporter of all aspects of world reconstruction, who stated, through Beveridge, the need to combat all the ills that man is heir to. Want, sickness, ignorance, poverty and idleness -- these are five great adversaries, real enemies in the social struggle, and they must be destroyed to save humanity

The Christian leadership in the world, too, has been equally

alive to this problem. The constant vicissitudes in human conditions have prompted the Catholic world to issue Encyclicles designed to reconcile capital and labour. We could find no apter condemnation of any system that oppresses man, whether economically or politically, than is contained in the words of the one entitled "Quadragesimo anno", on the eve of the last war, in which it is stated with admirable vision that the concentration of wealth and power produces three types of conflict: Firstly, the struggle is joined for the conquest of economic power; then a battle begins for control of the government, hence for the power to misuse one's strength and influence in economic conflicts; finally, the fight moves into the international field where States are engaged, endeavouring to use force and political power to promote the economic interests of their respective subjects.

These words of Pope Pius XI are clearly the utterances of a militant on the stage of democracy on which we are all playing our part, and the admonition that springs, limpid and clear, from this appreciation is that wealth must not be in the hands of the few, but in the hands of the just, nor must it be inaccessible, if it is to be an expression of that social co-operation which will remove the causes and effects of distress, and produce the miracle of a world with fewer rich and fewer poor.

Social doctrines remain abstractions and historical facts till they assume the form of ordinary everyday achievements.

Doctrine is, metaphorically speaking, the didactic expression in words of organic ideas. Implementation harmonises doctrine and fact. Sometimes the doctrine is born of facts themselves. It springs from custom or reiterated facts. But today the reiterated fact is man's insecurity. The doctrine is the urgent need of producing social circumstances that will enable him to live free of difficulties. The fact is about to be realised. We have to transform the philosophy of abstraction into that of achievement. The hopes of all are with us in that task.

When, among groups of workers, social welfare takes the well-known forms of social insurance or superannuation or old age pensions, it will be appreciated that all social subsidies are always actuarially assessed. In some cases the advantages are adequate and obvious; but in others the absence of benefits for workers indicates that no contribution is being made towards the removal of the despair that is born of poverty or the despondency engendered by want.

Hence the social problems whose solution is destined to strengthen the common welfare demand prudent and continuous action on our part.

No nation on earth has permanently solved all the problems with which man grapples. But that is no reason for our failing to do our utmost.

The difficulties encountered in seeking a happy solution to many questions which are vital to this Assembly must not obstruct our will or disturb our action.

We must begin to take concrete action. The giddy speed of events in recent times has put many noble ideas out of date. It is not time that has separated them from us, it is the chain of events that is responsible for a gap which is certainly unreal.

Yesterday's happenings are out of date if we analyse them to-day. Our present words may be old to-morrow.

But from all this we can draw an important conclusion: the invariable element is the human being, who remains and will remain the source of wealth and happiness. Let us see to it that he does not remain the instrument of his own misfortune!

The two wars of these first fifty years of the century in which we are living have taught us much. No one has been spared the repercussions of these unhappy struggles. No one has escaped the misery of these wars.

Hence it is urgently necessary for us to destroy misunderstanding and poverty by implementing all the principles of solidarity and agreement through a policy of social justice, with a view to winning the fight for general welfare.

It is often a difficult and complicated task, and one of vast ramifications, to carry out certain theoretical plans for the protection of man. Surveys, profound analyses, economic theories, actuarial findings combine to stress the urgency of seeking satisfactory solutions once for all.

That is our task at this present juncture, and it is also the aim of the Argentine proposal, copies of which are to be found on the delegates' desks.

Our task is to create in the sphere of doctrine, and thereafter to establish by positive legislation in the sphere of social security, Old Age Rights as a universally accepted formula designed, in our view, to end human difficulties in the hardest years of man's life.

This document is meant to be a constructive contribution towards nobly smoothing man's path in the final stages of his life and saving him from abject poverty at a time when his strength is failing and when he is deprived of the aid of the family or legal institutions responsible for his protection.

It is an Argentine contribution to the solution of these problems, and one most noble in its origins.

This concern springs from the strong desire to give a universal character to the principles of social security, which are the very foundation of the new social justice advocated in my country.

The problems of old age, abandoned and destitute of the necessities of life, have always been of concern to Governments. Why, then, should they not be of concern to Argentina?

Nevertheless, final solutions have not been reached. A vast unexplored field is that of aid to man in the painful years of his life, those of his old age. Orientation, precept and practice, have been stages in the solving of many other problems. But the urgency of social questions and legislation thereon have not developed at the same pace, nor by equal stages.

This concern on Argentina's part has a most noble origin, since the Declaration of the Rights of Old Age is a product of the Social Welfare Foundation "Dona Maria Eva Duarte de Peron", an institution established with a view to exerting the most determined and energetic efforts in defence of humanity and to giving the consistently sacred and exalted work of a people definite characteristics embodying the redeeming unity of mankind.

It has, as I said, a most noble origin, since the Rights of Old Age have been proclaimed and promulgated by one of the American women who has worked most persistently and untiringly to achieve the social well-being of the Argentine workers; who has worked most enthusiastically to establish social security as an aid to the solution of universal problems. She has written pages that are incorporated, through their influence and achievement, in the very life of the Republic, and the social defence of mankind, unremittingly and untiringly pursued, shows the place occupied by the women of the world in the constant and constructive protection of human energies. Let this tribute of my people to an Argentine woman be also the expression of their feeling for all the women of the world who work for human happiness.

This problem of the Rights of Old Age must be viewed from the

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universal standpoint. Just as the problems of childhood are duly guided and governed by skilful legislation confirmed in the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the child, so also must the life of the aged be protected at the very point where the protective laws cease to apply.

The protection of mankind from the cradle to the grave is an indispensable social principle. It is particularly important in old age, a stage of life reached after fulfilment of all the obligations of the normal processes of evolution, and one in which it is most necessary to apply the principles of highest Christian justice.

This Argentine Declaration aims at the happiness and well-being of mankind in old age.

The growth of a co-operative spirit between the peoples in social matters gives us reason to believe that these rights can be universally applied, thus putting an end to the social injustice implied by the possible abandonment of the aged.

Delegates supporting this Declaration of the Rights of Old Age on behalf of their respective countries will not be giving their support to a document produced by one nation, but to mankind as a whole.

In my opinion there is no better way of giving final expression to the universal value of the Argentine Declaration than to recall the words of Senora de Peron when, expounding Argentine social principles in connection with this Declaration, she publicly stated:

"Justice and solidarity do not, and cannot, know any frontiers.

They are higher manifestations of the human conscience, forces that reveal the divine inspiration animating our lives, which seeks to perfect itself in the face of eternity. No person unfit for work and no aged person should be without the necessary support of the community, even though in neither case have contributions been paid to any provident fund."

This is the motive and essence of this Declaration, and this, too, is the reason for the continual effort to embody finally in the form of institutions the Rights of Old Age as a Charter protecting mankind and particularly the working masses that are the backbone of the democracy we practise and serve and the creative force of its institutions and progress.

With the realization of these Rights we also hope to advance towards social reform and towards a peaceful life and productive labour

On behalf of my country I call for your support for this Declaration which expresses the spirit of our peoples and represents the supreme, universal will.