

## MSGR. TOMASI: ENSURING EDUCATION TO SYRIAN CHILDREN

In Syria, four years after the beginning of the conflict, there are more than five million displaced children and another two million live as refugees outside the borders, out of a total of four million Syrian refugees in neighboring countries. According to UNICEF, over ten thousand children have died, and primary school enrollment in the country has declined by half. The number of people in need of emergency aid has doubled in a year. Giuseppe Beltrami interviewed Msgr. Silvano Tomasi, permanent observer of the Holy See to the UN offices in Geneva:

R. - The situation in the Middle East continues to be critical. Violence is the daily expression of the hostilities that continue in this region. The situation is still the worst in northern Iraq and in Syria, where the fighting is fiercer and more systematic.

Q. - Children and their families are among the most affected. What steps should the international community take to help them?

R. – The victims of the belligerence are families, who are split up or destroyed, and many children. In fact, half of the population in the refugee camps in the Middle East consists of children, and they need special protection, because they are the society's future. Among the measures that should be taken, first of all, these children must be registered when they are born, so that they have a legal position in society. These measures should be taken concretely, by facilitating the registration process through the elimination of taxes, with offices providing details and specialized people helping to contact these families. Even the education of children is a big problem. In Syria alone, more than five thousand schools have been destroyed; and, in the area controlled by the so-called Islamic State, schools are being systematically destroyed in order to prevent the education of children, so that they can be raised in a context of fanaticism, which then even leads them to become "suicide bombers"—that is, children who, packed with explosives, are sent to attack military targets. Therefore, it is crucial to continue defending the protection of the rights of the children, but also those of all the members of their families. Now, in this sense, the international community's responsibility is to facilitate the achievement of peace, through the political will of meetings, dialogue, and coordination. Then, if this is not possible, other, more energetic, stronger ways of defending them against this kind of genocide, which is ongoing throughout the region, need to be found through the structures of the international community such as the United Nations and the Security Council.