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Vatican calls for homosexuality to be decriminalized

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VATICAN CITY -- After opposing a United Nations declaration that called for the decriminalization of homosexuality last month, the Vatican issued its own call to eliminate criminal penalties for homosexuality.

But the Vatican said that the U.N. declaration "goes beyond this goal and instead gives rise to uncertainty in the law and challenges existing human rights norms."

The statement by the Holy See's U.N. delegation was a response to the "Declaration on Human Rights, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity," presented to the U.N. General Assembly Dec. 18.

An explanatory note published in the official Vatican newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano* said that if the resolution on sexual orientation aimed simply at ensuring no country treated homosexuality as a crime, "there would have been no reason for [the Vatican] to criticize that document."

"The Catholic church maintains that free sexual acts between adult persons must not be treated as crimes to be punished by civil authorities," said the newspaper.

The Vatican specifically objected to the declaration's use of the terms "sexual orientation" and "gender identity," which it said had no established meaning in international law.

According to the Vatican newspaper, these terms "imply that sexual identity is defined only by culture," and their use in the declaration is part of an attempt to "equate same-sex unions with marriage and to give homosexual couples the chance to adopt or 'procreate' children."

The paper argued the declaration would endanger "other human rights," such as "liberty of expression ... thought, conscience and religion," since it might limit religions in their freedom to teach that homosexual behavior is morally wrong.

The non-binding declaration, which was sponsored by France and backed by the 27-member European Union, received 66 votes in the 192-member U.N. General Assembly. Aside from the Holy See, opponents included China, Russia, the United States and the 56-member Organization of the Islamic Conference.

Homosexual behavior is against the law in dozens of countries and punishable by death in several.

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