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Archbishop Christophe-Zakhia el-Kassis, the Holy See's new permanent observer to the United Nations in New York, poses in an undated photo with U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres. (OSV News/Eskinder Debebe, courtesy United Nations)

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Hate speech "contradicts the commandment to love one's neighbor," said the Vatican's top diplomat to the United Nations.

Archbishop Christophe el-Kassis, apostolic nuncio and the Holy See's permanent observer to the U.N., shared his thoughts in a statement during the Sept. 17 "Global Conference on Promoting Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue and Tolerance in Countering Hate Speech."

The conference, which took place at the U.N.'s New York headquarters, was sponsored by the U.N.'s Alliance of Civilizations, created in 2005 to address social and cultural polarization.

In his address — which came one day after three Vatican dicasteries released a new note on the importance of interreligious and ecumenical dialogue — el-Kassis said hate speech "poisons public discourse, inflames division, and too often prepares the ground for violence and persecution."

Such damage is inflicted regardless of whether hate speech is "directed against individuals or communities on the basis of their religion, ethnicity, nationality, or any other characteristic," he said.

While "freedom of expression is a fundamental right that must be protected," said the archbishop, "this freedom carries corresponding responsibilities."

"Speech that deliberately incites hatred or violence cannot claim the protection of liberty," he said, since "it erodes the very conditions in which genuine freedom can flourish."

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The Holy See "reaffirms that every human person is created in the image and likeness of God and possesses an inviolable dignity that no ideology, ideology of hatred, or expression of contempt may diminish," the archbishop stressed.

That "foundational truth" creates "the moral imperative to reject every form of intolerance, discrimination, and hate speech that wounds the human family and undermines the conditions for peaceful coexistence," said el-Kassis.

He quoted Pope Leo XIV's May 12, 2025, address to media representatives, during which the pope said, "Let us disarm words and we will help to disarm the world."

El-Kassis also noted that "peace cannot be woven by words alone."

He clarified that "true tolerance is not indifference or relativism," but rather "the active recognition of the equal dignity of every person and the freedom of conscience that belongs to each."

Authentic tolerance "requires the patient effort of dialogue, mutual understanding, and the rejection of stereotypes," said el-Kassis.

He added, "In this spirit the Holy See promotes interreligious and intercultural dialogue as an essential path toward overcoming prejudice and building a better world for all."