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The Holy See at the 69th World Health Assembly: Catholic health institutions, committed to fighting neglected diseases

Vatican City, 25 May 2016 – Archbishop Jean-Marie Mupendawatu, head of the Holy See delegation at the 69th World Health Assembly held in Geneva, Switzerland from 23 to 28 May, gave a speech this morning in which he commended the Report on Health in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (WHA69/15), which underscores the commitment to an integrated multi-sectorial approach in which health is not only one of the several goals that are interlinked, but influences and is influenced by other goals and targets as an integral part of sustainable development.

"The implementation of the ambitious 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its 17 goals and 169 associated targets will ensure the promotion of an economically, socially and environmentally viable future for our planet and for present and future generations. The Holy See delegation welcomes the vital emphasis on the dignity of the human person and the strong focus on equity expressed in the pledge that 'no one will be left behind'. This in terms of health is expressed in goal 3, to 'Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages', which has 13 targets that are underpinned by universal coverage as the key to the achievement of all the others."

"According to the United Nations Declaration, sustainable development goals are 'integrated and indivisible' in that progress in one area is dependent on progress in many others, and they are also global in nature and universally applicable as they seek to be relevant to all countries", he observed, emphasising that "one of the key challenges for the new Agenda is translating this basic principle of being 'integrated and indivisible' into practical action. This is more critical where the synergies are less direct, as in the link between climate change and the spread of vector-borne diseases. With regard to action to combat climate change and its impact on health, my delegation wishes to underscore the need for more political will and strong commitment from civil society in order to reach truly meaningful and effective global agreements on the environment. Often international negotiations cannot make significant progress due to positions taken by countries which place their national interests above the global common good."

He went on to quote the Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si*, on care for our common home, in which Pope Francis stresses the need to think of one world with a common plan, and notes that "an interdependent world ...motivates us to ensure that solutions are proposed from a global perspective, and not simply to defend the

interests of a few countries... A global consensus is essential for confronting the deeper problems, which cannot be resolved by unilateral actions on the part of individual countries. Such a consensus could lead, for example, to planning a sustainable and diversified agriculture, developing renewable and less polluting forms of energy, encouraging a more efficient use of energy, promoting a better management of marine and forest resources, and ensuring universal access to drinking water."

Finally, he reiterated that "in pursuit of the targets carried forward from the unfinished Agenda, the Holy See would like to reiterate the commitment of Catholic Health Care institutions to continue efforts to end the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and neglected tropical disease and combat other communicable diseases. With regard to the latter, the Pontifical Council for Pastoral Assistance to Health Care Workers and the Nippon Foundation have organised a Symposium on the theme 'Towards Holistic Care for People with Hansen's Disease, Respectful of their Dignity', to take place in Rome on 9 and 10 June, with the purpose of addressing the triple challenge of reducing the disease burden, helping the sick and their families and integrating them into society. The Symposium is organised with the collaboration of the Raoul Follereau Foundation, the Sovereign Order of Malta and the Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation."

Before concluding, Archbishop Mupendawatu announced that later this year, from 10 to 12 November, the Pontifical Council for Pastoral Assistance to Health Care Workers will hold its 31st International Conference addressing the issue of Rare Diseases and Neglected Tropical Diseases, which will draw experts and participants from over 60 countries to examine the problem of neglected diseases, especially those affecting the most vulnerable.
