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Intervention of the Holy See Delegation at the 70th World Health Assembly (Geneva, Switzerland, 22-27 May 2017)

The following is the full text pronounced by His Excellency Msgr. Ivan Jurkovič, Holy See Permanent Observer at the United Nations in Geneva, on 23 May at the 70th World Health Assembly taking place in the Swiss city from 22 to 27 May 2017.

Intervention by His Excellency Msgr. Ivan Jurkovič

Mr. President,

1. The Holy See delegation recognizes that health promotion is a fundamental aspect of advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and is also a necessary component for socio-economic stability. It has been duly noted that “weak health systems remain an obstacle in many countries, resulting in deficiencies in coverage for even the most basic health services.”¹ The current and emerging global health challenges call for better health systems that are capable of delivering effective and affordable interventions for prevention and treatment to all, especially those in greatest need, those in extreme poverty and the most disadvantaged in our societies, including migrants and refugees, who represent a vexing sign of our times. This is in line with the pledge that “no one will be left behind.”² As Pope Francis observed, “the simplest and best measure and indicator for the implementation of the new *Agenda* for development will be effective, practical and immediate access, on the part of all, to essential material and spiritual goods.”³ Strong and resilient health systems are indeed critical for the achievement of the set goals and targets for health, which above all aim at ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at every age.⁴

National efforts to build better health systems will certainly require continued technical guidance from the World Health Organisation, as well as support from development partners in order to overcome the funding shortfalls in health. In addition, besides strong and accountable infrastructures, health systems need to keep the human person and his/her physical, emotional and spiritual needs at the centre of the care they provide, in full respect for the sacredness of human life in all its stages and the dignity of every person.⁵

2. Mr. President, as States embark on planning, investing and implementing measures for the development of

quality infrastructure and the creation of resilient health systems, it is important that central governments do not focus only on systems that are directly coordinated and operated by state institutions, but that they have an inclusive approach that embraces all major stake-holders, especially religious organizations whose contribution to health service delivery is fundamental.⁶ In fact in many countries, religious organization and other faith based institutions assume significant responsibility for health systems and thus should be included in the formulation of policies related to health systems and should be given access to adequate resources in order to assure the strength and capacity of such undertakings in the religious and non-governmental sectors.

3. Lastly, Mr. President, a well-functioning health system ought to have among other things a reliable supply of medicines and technologies. However, the situation on the ground, as it emerges from the Report of the Secretariat on the progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with regard to access to selected essential medicines, calls for resolute action from the international community. It is recorded that median availability of selected essential medicines is only 56% in the public sector of lower-middle-income countries. Moreover, “innovation for new products remains focused away from the health needs of those living in developing countries... and as little as 1% of all funding for health research and development is allocated to diseases that predominantly affect developing countries.”⁷ We need to forge partnerships that will help to align health research and development with global health demands and needs, in order to ensure increased access to essential drugs for all. As Pope Francis has affirmed: “health, indeed, is not a consumer good, but a universal right which means that access to healthcare services cannot be a privilege.”⁸ In this regard, the new Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development has planned an International Conference around the theme “**Addressing Global Health Disparities**”, which will take place in the Vatican, from 16 to 18 November 2017. You are all most welcome to participate.

Thank you, Mr. President,

1 WHO, *Progress in implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Report by Secretariat, A70/35*, n. 3.

2 United Nations General Assembly resolution 70/1 of September 2015, entitled *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, preamble para.2

3 Pope Francis, *Address during the Meeting with Members of the United Nations General Assembly*, United Nations Headquarters, 25 September 2015.

4 SDG, 3.

5 Cf. United Nations General Assembly, *Letter dated 25 September 2016 from the Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, A/71/1430*, nn.17-19.

6 At present the Catholic Church has over 116,000 social and healthcare institutions world-wide. Cf. *Statistical Year Book of the Church 2015*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 2016, pp. 355-365.

7 WHO, *Progress in implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Report by Secretariat, A70/35*, n. 28.

8 Francis, *Address to Doctors with Africa- CUAMM*, May 7, 2016.
