



Statement by H.E. Archbishop Ivan Jurkovič, Permanent Observer of the Holy See
to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva
142nd Meeting of the Executive Board of the World Health Organization - Agenda Item 4.3:
Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health (2016-2030)
22 January 2018

Mr. Chairman,

The Holy See delegation shares many of the concerns and observations considered in the report of the Director-General: including efforts to achieve Universal Health Coverage; to improve specific data related to the health of women, children, and adolescents; to end violence against women and children; and to revise child health policies and programs to extend their range from infancy to 18 years of age.

We wish to raise serious concerns, however, about the inclusion of an item on so-called “safe abortion” in this report and in the Global Strategy in general. The Holy See does not consider abortion or abortion services to be a dimension of reproductive health or reproductive health care.

Our delegation is also concerned about the reference to WHO's engagement, together with other UN Departments and Programmes, in the launch of the open-access Global Abortion Policies Database. The latter is described, in a WHO Statement of 23 June 2017, as aiming “to promote greater transparency of abortion laws and policies, as well as to improve countries' accountability for the protection of women and girls' health and human rights.” The Holy See does not endorse any form of legislation which gives legal recognition to abortion and thus strongly objects to efforts by UN specialized agencies to promote national legislation that permits the taking of a child's life while still *in utero*.

Moreover, the Holy See cannot accept a claim that promotion of so-called “safe abortion” is a means to “protect” the human rights of women and girls, when, in fact, abortion denies the child *in utero* his or, more frequently, her most basic right – to life itself. As Pope Francis has recalled, “human life is sacred and inviolable. Every civil right rests on the recognition of the first and fundamental right, that of life, which is not subordinate to any condition, be it quantitative, economic or, least of all, ideological.”¹

¹ Address of Pope Francis to the Italian Pro Life Movement, 11 April 2014, Vatican City, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/april/documents/papa-francesco_20140411_movim-per-la-vita.html