



Statement by His Excellency Archbishop Ivan Jurkovič  
Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations  
and Other International Organizations in Geneva  
at the 71st World Health Assembly  
*Geneva, 23 May 2018*

Mr. President,

1. The Holy See delegation wishes to thank the Director General and the Secretariat for maintaining a high-profile focus on Universal Health Coverage, and for keeping it as a top priority on the agenda of the World Health Organization. Over the past decades, States and non-state actors have taken big strides towards the achievement of this goal; nevertheless, we are still far from the desired result, since for many poor communities, families and individuals, access to the much-needed health care services remains an unachieved objective. We are all daunted by the disquieting fact that half the world's population is still unable to obtain many essential health services. At the same time, hundreds of millions are pushed into extreme poverty, because they have to pay for health services entirely from their own meagre resources.<sup>1</sup> Since everyone should have the possibility of benefiting from necessary health services without falling into poverty, the virtue of solidarity urges us to work towards this goal.

Experience has shown that progress on universal health coverage requires a strong political will and a commitment to concrete steps that improve health for all people. While countries can always count on technical support and guidance from the World Health Organization, the advancement of universal health coverage in each country will require both the strengthening of health systems<sup>2</sup> and a shift away from approaches that focus excessively on diseases and institutions towards health services that place the person firmly at the centre. . Moreover, countries must fruitfully engage with the private-sector, whose contribution to this universal health coverage is crucial. Faith-based institutions form a significant part of this private-sector, and in many countries they are the primary partners of the State in health service delivery across

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/universal-health-coverage-\(uhc\)](http://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/universal-health-coverage-(uhc)). The most recent data from 117 countries show that an average of 9.3% of people in each country spend more than 10% of their household budget on health care, a level of spending that is likely to expose a household to financial hardship. Cf. WHO, *World health statistics 2017: monitoring health for the SDGs*, Sustainable Development Goals, p.12.

<sup>2</sup> Advancing universal health coverage will in turn require health system strengthening to deliver effective and affordable services to prevent ill health and to provide health promotion, prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and palliation services.

the country, especially through their extensive network of health care institutions, which endeavour to guarantee access even in very remote and inaccessible areas.

2. Mr. President, our efforts to advance health for all people must take account of the essential nexus between environment and health, which involves also the management of environmental determinants of health. My delegation wishes to thank the Director General for the reports on health, environment and climate change (A71/10; A71/11 and A71/10 Add.1), which highlight many of the growing environmental risks and outline a road map for an enhanced global response to the adverse health effects of air pollution. Currently, environmental changes and extreme weather events are occurring at an unprecedented pace. Many countries with vulnerable populations are experiencing the heavy burden of both communicable and non-communicable diseases. As noted by the report “avoidable environmental risk factors cause at least 13 million deaths every year and about one quarter of the global burden of disease. Air pollution alone causes about 6.5 million deaths a year or one in eight of all deaths, placing it among the top global risks to health” (A71/10, n.2).

Mr. President, Pope Francis in his Encyclical letter, *Laudato si'*, On the Care for Our Common Home, emphasizes that, “the urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change... Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home... We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all... *Indeed*, everyone’s talents and involvement are needed to redress the damage caused by human abuse of God’s creation” (*Laudato si'*, nn.13-14).<sup>3</sup> We therefore welcome the road map for an enhanced global response to adverse health effects of air pollution (A71/10 Add.1) as a step in the right direction.

Thank you, Mr. President,

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<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis in *Laudato si'* warns about the health hazards due to pollution and the grave implications of climate change. He therefore calls for the development of comprehensive solutions to the problems of our common home through fruitful dialogue, Cf. *Laudato si'* nn. 20-61.