



Statement by His Excellency Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva at the 14th Session of the Human Rights Council: Maternal Mortality Panel
Geneva, 14 June 2010

Mr. President,

Based on the significant commitment and experience of the Catholic Church in assisting mothers and newborn babies, since the earliest of times, especially through its hospitals and maternity and pediatric clinics, my delegation wishes to express its urgent concerns about the shocking number of maternal deaths that continue to occur – estimated by reliable indicators at 350,000 a year – most especially among the poorest and most marginalized and disenfranchised populations.¹

The Holy See's approach to Maternal Mortality is holistic, since it gives priority to the rights of mothers and child, both those already born and those awaiting birth in the womb of the mother. Not surprisingly, a strong correlation is revealed between statistics related to Maternal Mortality and those related to Neonatal Death, indicating that many measures aimed at combating maternal mortality, in fact, also contribute to a further reduction of child mortality. Moreover, we should not forget that 3 million babies die annually during their first week of life, another 3 million are stillborn, 2.3 million children die each year during their first year of life.

Mr. President,

Improvements to reduce Maternal Mortality have been made possible due to higher per capita income, higher education rates for women and increasing availability of basic medical care, including "skilled birth attendants". A recent study on Maternal Mortality has suggested that maternal mortality in Africa could be significantly reduced if HIV-positive mothers were given access to antiretroviral medications. The availability of emergency obstetric care, including the provision of universal pre and post-natal care, and adequate transport to medical facilities (when necessary), skilled birth attendants, a clean blood supply and a clean water supply, appropriate antibiotics, and the introduction of a minimum age of 18 years for marriage, are all measures that could benefit both mothers and their children. Most importantly, if the international community wishes to effectively reduce the tragic rates of maternal mortality, respect

¹ According to a study recently published in the medical journal, *The Lancet*, (Vol.375, Issue 9726, pp.1609-1623, 8 May 2010) there are approximately 350,000 maternal deaths *per annum* worldwide; WHO and UNICEF estimate 500,000 such deaths each year. The difference is attributed to diverse approaches to statistical modeling.

for and promotion of the right to health and of access to medications must not only be spoken about, but also be put into action, by States as well as by non-governmental organizations and by civil society.

Mr. President,

Policies aimed at combating Maternal Mortality and Child Mortality need to strike a delicate balance between the rights of mother and those of the child, both of whom are rights bearers, the first of which is the right to life. The maternity clinics and hospitals promoted by the Catholic Church do exactly that: they save the lives both of mothers and of child, born and yet-to-be-born.

Thank you, Mr. President.