



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 130th Session of the Executive Board, World Health Organization, Agenda Item 6.4, 16 “Early marriages, adolescent and young pregnancies”
Geneva, 1 December 2011

Mr. Chairman,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this important topic. The Holy See Delegation understands the serious risks incurred by young women and men when they are influenced or, worse yet, forced to contract marriage before they have developed the physical and affective maturity to make and keep a permanent and mutually faithful commitment as husband and wife.

The report prepared by the Secretariat already points out the necessity to influence family and community norms related to delay of marriage among young people, to the retention of girls in school, especially at primary and secondary levels, and to the encouragement of men and boys to call into question prevailing norms and stereotypes that can be harmful to women, girls, families, and communities.

Our delegation wishes to register its serious concern, however, with regard to the recommendations in the Secretariat report that promote access to so-called “emergency contraceptives” and to so-called “safe abortion care”. Re-affirming that human life begins at the moment of conception and that life must be defended and protected, the Holy See can never condone abortion or policies that favour abortion.¹

Mr. Chairman, our delegation “...does not consider abortion or abortion services to be a dimension of reproductive health or reproductive health services ... [nor does it] endorse any form of legislation which gives legal recognition to abortion,”² which is the very antithesis of human rights.

¹ *cf.*, Statement of the Holy See at the Concluding Session of the 21st Special Session of the General Assembly for the Overall Review and Appraisal of the Implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development New York, 2 July 1999.

² *cf.*, Reservations and Statement of Interpretation by the Holy See Delegation during concluding session of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 15 September 1995, <http://www.its.caltech.edu/~nmcenter/women-cp/beijing3.html>