



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 65th World Health Assembly
Geneva, 21 - 26 May 2012

Madame President,

My delegation, in conjunction with other delegations, wishes to reaffirm the Resolution on *Sustainable health financing structures and universal coverage* (WHA64.9), which among others urges member States to aim for affordable universal coverage and access for all citizens on the basis of equity and solidarity. As Pope Benedict XVI emphasizes, “in the health-care sector too, which is an integral part of everyone’s life and of the common good, it is important to establish a real distributive justice which, on the basis of objective needs, guarantees adequate care to all. Consequently, if it is not to become inhuman, the world of health care cannot disregard the moral rules that must govern it.”¹

The goal of the International Community is to enable everyone to access health services without running the risk of financial hardship in doing so (WHA58.33). Despite the progress made in some countries, we are still a long way from this target. There is need therefore for greater commitment at all levels in order to ensure that the right to health care is rendered effective by furthering access to basic health care. In this regard, the Holy See delegation supports the integration of universal coverage in high-level meetings related to health or social development, as well as its inclusion as a priority in the global development agenda.

At the recent Forum on Universal Health Coverage held in Mexico City, on 2 April, 2012, it was noted that more countries, especially those with emerging economies, are moving towards universal coverage, and this is very encouraging. The results obtained in these countries are not simply a fruit of financial resources; it has been observed that good policies that promote equity have guaranteed better health for a greater number of citizens in these countries. Therefore, my delegation strongly believes that in the endeavor to promote universal coverage, fundamental values such as equity, human rights and social justice need to become explicit policy objectives.

Secondly, Mme. President, it has been shown by both low and middle-income countries that progress towards universal coverage is not the prerogative of high-income

¹ Benedict XVI, *Message to Participants in the 25th International Conference Organized by the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers*, 15 November 2010, Vatican City.

countries. Nevertheless, most low-income countries need the support of the international community, especially of high-income countries and other development partners, in order to overcome the funding shortfalls in health. The Holy See delegation therefore wishes to reiterate the call for greater global solidarity and commitment in development assistance for health. Evoking the words of the Holy Father, “more economically developed nations should do all they can to allocate larger portions of their gross domestic product to development aid, thus respecting the obligations that the international community has undertaken in this regard.”²

Lastly, at the level of each single nation, the progress towards universal coverage cannot be the effort of the state machinery alone. It requires support from the civil society and communities, whose contribution to health service delivery is fundamental. In this regard States should, “in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, generously acknowledge and support initiatives arising from the different social forces and combine spontaneity with closeness to those in need.”³ Faith-based organizations and Church-sponsored healthcare institutions, inspired by Charity, are part of those living forces in the healthcare field.

With over 120,000 social and healthcare institutions worldwide,⁴ the Catholic Church is in many developing countries, one of the key partners of the State in healthcare delivery, providing services in remote areas to rural low-income populations, enabling them to access services that would otherwise be out of their reach. The efforts and contribution of such organizations and institutions towards universal access, merit the recognition and support of both the State and the International Community, without obliging them to participate in activities they find morally abhorrent. Thus, Pope Benedict XVI asks “international agencies to acknowledge *them* and to offer *them* assistance, respecting their specific character and acting in a spirit of collaboration.”⁵

Thank you, Mme. President, and God bless you all.

² Benedict XVI, Encyclical letter *Caritas in veritate*, n. 60.

³ Benedict XVI, Encyclical letter *Deus Caritas est*, n. 28b.

⁴ Secretaria Status, *Statistical Year Book of the Church 2009*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 2009, pp. 355-365.

⁵ Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus*, n. 73.