



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 66th World Health Assembly
Geneva, 20 - 28 May 2013

Mr. President, distinguished delegates,

I have the honour to convey to you the greetings and blessing of the Holy Father Pope Francis, who since the beginning of his Pontificate has shown great concern for the sick and suffering, and wishes this august assembly fruitful deliberations.

It has been duly emphasized that health contributes to the achievement of development and benefits from it. My delegation welcomes the resolve to prioritise health in the next generation of global development goals. The task before us is that of describing health objectives in an appropriate and convincing way. In this regard, the Holy See strongly believes that setting universal coverage as an objective of health and development policy (*A66/24*), would be a surer way of accommodating the wide range of health concerns, which includes sustaining the gains made so far, as well as attending to the broadened health agenda.

Moreover, while acknowledging the close links between health and development, my delegation wishes to underscore the need for integral development and not mere economic growth. Health and development ought to be integral if they are to respond fully to the needs of every human person. What we hold important is the human person - each person, each group of people, and humanity as a whole.¹ The essential quality of “authentic” development is that it must be “integral” in that it has to promote the good of every person and of the whole person, that is, in every single dimension.² Therefore, both health care and development must attend to the spiritual state of the person as well as to the physical, emotional, economic and social factors that influence one’s wellbeing.

Secondly, Mr. President, within the framework of strengthening health through the life course, efforts are being made to save the lives of millions of women and children who continue to die every year from conditions that can easily be prevented with existing medical commodities. Thus, *Resolution EB132.R4*, among others, urges member States to improve the quality, supply and use of 13 “life-saving commodities.” The Holy See strongly agrees with the need to achieve further reductions in the loss of life and

¹ Cf. Paul VI, *Populorum progressio*, n.14.

² Cf. Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, nn.11, 18.

prevention of illness through increased access to inexpensive interventions that are respectful of the life and dignity of all mothers and children at all stages of life, from conception to natural death. In relation to this, the Holy See delegation wishes to raise serious concerns about the Report of the Secretariat and the Resolution recommended by the Executive Board to promote the implementation of the recommendations of the Commission on Life-Saving Commodities for Women and Children. While indeed some of the recommendations are truly life-saving, that of "emergency contraception" can hardly be labeled as such since it is well known that, when conception already has occurred, certain substances used in "emergency contraception" produce an abortifacient effect. For my delegation, it is totally unacceptable to refer to a medical product that constitutes a direct attack on the life of the child *in utero* as a "life-saving commodity" and, much worse, to encourage "increasing use of such substances in all parts of the world."

Thirdly Mr. President, given the significant impact of Non-Communicable Diseases on both morbidity and mortality in all parts of the world, the Holy See delegation welcomes the proposed Global Action Plan for the control of non-communicable diseases 2013-2020 (A66/9). Moreover, we were especially pleased that the plan acknowledges the key role of civil society, including faith-based organizations, in mobilizing and engaging families and communities to prevent and treat such illnesses before they cause debilitating conditions or premature death. Our delegation is aware that Catholic Church-inspired organizations and institutions throughout the world already have committed themselves to pursue such actions at global, regional, and local community levels.

In connection with *Resolution WHA65.3* on strengthening non-communicable disease policies to promote active ageing, the Holy See wishes to participate in exploring the various aspects of prevention and control of non-communicable diseases in older age. Already thousands of faith-based institutions offer aged care services around the world, and they are growing rapidly as populations age. Our humble contribution to this venture will be an International Conference, to be held in the Vatican this coming November 21-23 on the topic: "*The Church at the Service of Sick Elderly People: Taking Care of People with Neurodegenerative Pathologies.*"

Finally, Mr. President, our delegation wishes to register its support for the Draft action plan for the prevention of visual impairment 2014-2019 (A66/11) and the related resolution *EB132.R1* calling for the endorsement of the "universal eye health" plan of action.

Thank you, Mr. President.