



Presentation by His Excellency Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva
at the 67th World Health Assembly
Geneva, 19 - 24 May 2014

Mr. President,

The Holy See is cognizant of the devastating impact of climate change, as reported by the WHO Secretariat, in various reports and advisories. That impact often is estimated in terms of additional financial costs and burden of care to be assumed by both governmental and non-governmental health care structures. Climate change also deeply affects the social and environmental determinants of health, including clear air, safe drinking water, supply of sufficient and nutritious food, and adequate shelter. There is overwhelming evidence that human activities have greatly contributed to recent warming of the earth's surface, and that climate change as well as its consequences will continue into the future. It has also been observed that climate change will act mainly by aggravating health problems that already exist, and that most risks will apply in populations that are currently most affected by climate-related diseases.

Expressing his concern about the greedy exploitation of the environment Pope Francis observed that "Even if 'nature is at our disposition', all too often we do not 'respect it or consider it a gracious gift which we must care for and set at the service of our brothers and sisters, including future generations.'"¹ He then called for responsibility on the part of all in pursuing policies that are respectful of the earth which is our common home.

In the face of signs of an "ecological crisis,"² my delegation wishes to reiterate the call made by Benedict XVI, and the challenging questions he made. He said: "Can we remain indifferent before the problems associated with such realities as climate change, desertification, the deterioration and loss of productivity in vast agricultural areas, the pollution of rivers and aquifers, the loss of biodiversity, the increase of natural catastrophes and the deforestation of equatorial and tropical regions? Can we disregard the growing phenomenon of 'environmental refugees.'"³ We must look beyond the purely scientific, medical, and economic issues related to climate change and come face to face with the persons whom it most affects? As with most natural disasters, climate-related emergencies cause more suffering and personal loss on those who live in poverty, who cannot afford protective structures to shield them from extreme forces of nature and who have little or no resources to arrange for temporary shelter and other basic necessities once

¹ Francis, *Address to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See*, 13 January 2014.

² John Paul II, *Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace*, n. 6-7.

³ Benedict XVI, *Message for the 2010 World Day of Peace*, n.4.

their homes have been severely damaged or totally destroyed. We therefore need to rethink the path we are travelling together.

Reflecting on these lamentable situations, Pope Benedict XVI appealed for greater solidarity to prevent or, at least, mitigate the impact of climate change on our more vulnerable brothers and sisters throughout the world. Such action will require more than economic allocations and policy-setting. He insisted that we must promote a different culture in all sectors of society and on the interpersonal level as well: "it is necessary to rediscover those values engraved on the heart of every person that have always inspired their action: the sentiment of compassion and of humanity for others, the duty of solidarity and the commitment to justice must return to being the basis of all action, including what is done by the international community."⁴

Mr. President, the Holy See delegation is happy to note that the reports before us and the WHO work-plan on climate change and health are part of this much desired rethinking and solidarity.⁵ This growing ecological awareness, needs to be helped to develop and mature, and find fitting expression in concrete programmes and initiatives,⁶ especially climate-resilient pathways for sustainable development, as well as appropriate transformations in economic, social, technological and political decisions and actions. "*The defense of life* and the consequent promotion of health, especially among very poor and developing peoples, will be simultaneously *the measure and the basic criterion of the ecological horizon* at both regional and world level."⁷

Secondly, Mr President, my delegation commends the secretariat for the report on efforts made for the management of autism spectrum disorders (A67/17), which among others shows progress made in creating awareness, clearing some of the myths surrounding autism, forging partnerships with civil society organizations committed to improving services and setting priorities for national and sub-national actions. It is the sincere hope of my delegation, that the implementation of these guidelines at the national levels, with the continued policy guidance and support from WHO, will help to alleviate the plight of many families, who often have to shoulder alone the emotional and economic burden arising from the demanding responsibility of caring for the children with these disorders. The Holy See wishes to contribute to these efforts with an International Conference organized by the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers, to be held in the Vatican this coming November 20- 22, on the topic: "*The Person with Autism Spectrum Disorders: Stir Hope.*"

Finally, Mr. President, with regard to Maternal, infant and young child nutrition, the Holy See delegation thanks the secretariat for the comprehensive report on this topic

⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, *Message to the Director General of FAO on the Occasion of World Food Day 2011*, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/food/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20111017_world-food-day-2011_en.html

⁵ Cf. John Paul II, *Address to the Conference on Environment and Health*, 24 March 1997; Benedict XVI, Encyclical letter *Caritas in veritate*, nn. 48-50.

⁶ Cf. John Paul II, *Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace*, n. 1.

⁷ John Paul II, *Address to the Conference on Environment and Health*, 24 March 1997.

(A67/15), which reflects efforts to assure the health and wellbeing of children worldwide. It is our conviction that organizations with strong links in local communities should be integrated as key partners in the implementation of this global strategy.

My delegation is also pleased to note that breastfeeding has been included as Global Target in the Strategy and is proposed as a key indicator for monitoring progress towards achieving the targets. Breastfeeding is a major protection against early child malnutrition and should therefore be protected, promoted as part of primary healthcare. It should be guaranteed by laws governing workplace practice and there should be acceptance for breastfeeding even in public. Unlike many who openly disparage mothers who choose to breastfeed their children in public, Pope Francis, during a baptism function in the Sistine Chapel last January, encouraged mothers to overcome hesitation of breastfeeding their children when they are hungry.

My sincere wish is that the work of this Assembly will help to reaffirm the centrality of the human person in all our efforts for health promotion.

God bless you all!

Thank you, Mr. President.