



Statement by H.E. Archbishop Ivan Jurkovič, Permanent Observer of the Holy See
to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva
at the 140th meeting of the Executive Board of the World Health Organization
23 January to 1 February 2017 on Agenda Item 10.3

“Public health dimension of the world drug problem”

Mr. Chairman,

The Holy See Delegation commends the Secretariat for clearly articulating the major public health concerns resulting from drug use, drug use disorders and related health conditions. The number of deaths that result from the use of psychoactive drugs, the level of drug-attributable disease burden, and the incidence of HIV infections as well as hepatitis B and hepatitis C caused by injecting drugs present compelling evidence that this situation has reached “alarming proportions”, as is stated in the report. This evidence should be sufficient to refute the claims among some social movements that the recreational use of psychoactive substances is not harmful and thus should be freely permitted in various social sectors.

While the Secretariat has outlined the important and unique role that the WHO should play in response to this global emergency, let us also acknowledge that a purely medical approach will not be sufficient to resolve the crisis. Pope Francis noted the following at a conference on this topic held at the Pontifical Academy of Sciences in November 2016: “Clearly there is no single cause of drug addiction. Rather, there are many factors that contribute to it, among which are the absence of a family, social pressures, the propaganda of drug dealers, and the desire for new experiences.”¹ Thus, a comprehensive and cooperative approach is required and should include the strengthening of capacity in health and social services, as well as cooperation with justice, education, and law enforcement sectors. Even these

¹ Pope Francis, Address *to Participants in the Meeting Sponsored by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences on: “Narcotics: Problems And Solutions To This Global Issue”* 24 November 2016, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/november/documents/papa-francesco_20161124_seminario-accademia-scienze.html

strategies, however, will not be effective unless intensive treatment and social rehabilitation are made available by States and by civil society institutions, including those sponsored by the Catholic Church and other religious organizations, in all parts of the world. As Pope Francis has maintained, each drug dependent person has “a unique personal story and must be listened to, understood, loved ... valued and appreciated in his or her dignity in order to enable them to be healed.”²

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

² *Ibid.*