



Statement by His Excellency Archbishop Ivan Jurković  
Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations  
and Other International Organizations in Geneva  
at the 35<sup>th</sup> Session of the Human Rights Council  
Item 3 – General Debate

Mr. President,

Some twenty years ago, the Pontifical Council for Health Care dedicated its annual conference to an in-depth examination of the physical, emotional, social, and spiritual implications of mental health. At that time, Pope John Paul II affirmed: “Whoever suffers from mental illness ‘always’ bears God’s image and likeness in themselves, as does every human being. In addition, they ‘always’ have the inalienable right not only to be considered as an image of God and therefore as a person, but also to be treated as such.”<sup>1</sup>

The Delegation of the Holy See, therefore, expresses its appreciation to the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health for his decision to focus this year’s report on the situation of people living with, or affected by, mental health problems. This issue has too long been ignored or, worse yet, been shrouded in fear, stigma, discrimination, and outright rejection that, in the past, led to “warehousing” of such persons in large, isolated, and closed institutions.

Hopefully, the Special Rapporteur’s caution against reductionist biomedical paradigms and his clear call that “forgotten issues beget forgotten people” will awaken the consciences, not only of human rights advocates, but also of policy-makers, mental health practitioners and support staff, family members, and local communities, to the inalienable and God-given dignity of each person, including those who are living with, or affected by, mental health challenges.

We must also be on our guard today, lest we impose new forms of “isolation” by fostering over-dependency on high dosages of psychotropic medications, by depriving patients of informed consent, of participating in their own treatment planning and exercising their own self-responsibility, and by social ostracism. A most serious threat to the wellbeing of such persons is the increasing encouragement and facilitation of assisted suicide among them. Regarding all these assaults on life and dignity, Pope Francis insists “...that human life is sacred and inviolable. Every civil right rests on the recognition of the first and fundamental right, that of life, which is not subordinate to any condition, be it quantitative, economic or, least of all, ideological... ‘We have created a «throw away» culture which is now spreading’ (Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 53). And in this way life, too, ends up being thrown away.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Pope John Paul II, Address to the Participants in the 11<sup>th</sup> International Conference of the Pontifical Council on Pastoral Care of Health Care Workers, 30 November 1996, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/speeches/1996/november/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_19961130\\_pc-hlthwork.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/speeches/1996/november/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19961130_pc-hlthwork.html)

<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, Address to the Italian Pro-Life Movement, 11 April 2014, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/april/documents/papa-francesco\\_20140411\\_movim-per-la-vita.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/april/documents/papa-francesco_20140411_movim-per-la-vita.html)

Mr. President, while the Special Rapporteur rightly promotes the adoption of an integrated bio-medical, psycho-social, and community-based delivery of mental health care, my Delegation also would like to point out the importance of spiritual care in helping persons living with, or affected by, mental health problems. Spiritual care should not be confused with, or mistaken by, so-called “faith healing” to the exclusion of medical, psychological, and social assistance. Spiritual care is an important component of “... integral care, that considers the person in his entirety, and that unites... the human body, with its psychological, social and spiritual dimension...”<sup>3</sup>

Thank you, Mr. President.

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<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, Address to the Participants in the 28<sup>th</sup> International Conference of the Pontifical Council for health Care Workers, 23 November 2013.

[http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/november/documents/papa-francesco\\_20131123\\_conferenza-operatori-sanitari.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/november/documents/papa-francesco_20131123_conferenza-operatori-sanitari.html)