



Statement by H.E. Archbishop Ivan Jurkovič, Permanent Observer of the Holy See
to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva
142nd Meeting of the Executive Board of the World Health Organization
Agenda Item 4.5: Improving access to assistive technology
24 January 2018

Mr. Chairman,

The Holy See Delegation recognizes the urgent need of more than a billion people who would benefit from one or more assistive products, as part of their medical treatment. It further highlights the limited access to such devices, especially for people living in low-income countries or even for poor people living in high- and middle-income countries. This Delegation is grateful to the Secretariat for including, in its report, an analysis of the need for more research and development that is focused on basic, low-technology products that could be more readily accessible, affordable, and acceptable to all people.

In addition, our delegation was pleased that the Secretariat raised issues that go beyond the medical and technological fields. Improvement in access to assistive technology cannot be achieved without finding solutions to obstacles encountered in relation to regulatory procedures, difficulties in accessing local repair and maintenance at affordable prices, problems with finding high quality items at low cost, and the lack of availability of assistive devices for persons affected by natural disasters or conflicts.

One issue that deserves greater attention and engagement by WHO is that of challenges related to intellectual property policies. In this regard, the Holy See became strongly engaged in the efforts of the World Intellectual Property Organization to develop the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired, or Otherwise Print Disabled. This Treaty was approved on 27 June 2013, and entered into force on 30 September 2016.

Mr. Chairman, this historic Treaty represents a strong signal that multilateralism can serve as an effective system to achieve the common good through the responsible involvement of all parties in a negotiation process. Thus, the Holy See encourages WHO to engage with the relevant UN agencies and multi-lateral structures as it seeks solutions for the challenges in improving access to assistive technology and the many complex issues related to accessibility and affordability of medicines and other medical products, especially for poor, marginalized and vulnerable persons.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.