



Opening Remarks by H.E. Archbishop Fortunatus Nwachukwu,
Apostolic Nuncio, Permanent Observer of the Holy See
to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva
at the Briefing/Breakfast on Diagnosis and Treatment
of Children Living with HIV and TB
Intercontinental Hotel

Geneva, 25 May 2022

Your Excellencies, Honorable Ministers of Health and all members of their Respective Delegations, and officials of the International and Non-Governmental Organizations,

It is a great honour to be invited to this important gathering at which I wish to express my appreciation for your deep commitment to the dignity of children, all of whom have been created in God's image. Most particularly today, we focus our attention on children who are living with HIV and TB and thus require access to early diagnosis and care. Without such attention and effective action, we will continue to lose too many young lives, and our world will be deprived of their talents and contributions to the human family. Many of us remember when no treatment for HIV disease was available and when medical professionals and pastoral caregivers struggled to accompany such patients along their last journey on the Earth. However, when we saw effective treatments being developed and when such medicines became available even in low- and middle-income countries, we have seen many people living with HIV now able to participate actively in work, in society, and able to care for

their families. This progress also led to fewer children being infected through vertical transmission from mother to child.

However, there is still much to be done. The public health experts report that we still have more than 150,000 babies being born with HIV each year; the number of children on treatment has not increased; 1.3 million children with HIV have not been diagnosed; and 100,000 children die each year from AIDS-related illnesses, and tuberculosis is the major cause of such deaths. In fact, 10% of all AIDS-related deaths occur among children. The majority of children living with TB are not diagnosed or given access to treatment; during 2020, some 226,000 children died of TB.

Time is running out for these children and adolescents, and the world cannot remain as uninterested bystanders. The COVID-19 pandemic created an unprecedented disruption in HIV and TB care for children and families. Decades of progress in access to paediatric testing, treatment, and care is now threatened.

Catholic-inspired and other religiously inspired organizations have been among the most active and effective providers of such diagnosis and care. Many religious communities are present throughout the world and willing to serve the most isolated and rural communities. The support of and partnership with these communities may greatly help offer a healthy future to children living with HIV and TB.

The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and, more recently, the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development have been pleased to convene, in Vatican City, five meetings of religious leaders, governmental officials, executive of pharmaceutical and diagnostic companies, representatives of inter-governmental organizations, regulatory agencies, and scientific and public health experts to address

the gaps in diagnosis and treatment of children living with HIV and TB. The Rome Action Plan was one of the outcomes that resulted from these meetings. It has brought much needed attention by decision-makers in public policy and private industry; it promoted needed research and development, and it has tackled issues regarding funding and pricing, as well as access to testing and preventive treatments in low- and middle-income countries. The platform also has developed an important monitoring instrument to track progress in saving the lives of these children. Your presence here today is a sign of the concern that governments have in such life-affirming actions. Hopefully, our discussions this morning and in the future will ensure that, through the Rome Paediatric HIV and TB Action Plan, all children will benefit from access to life-saving testing and treatment and will enjoy the health and wellbeing that they deserve.

I will close with the words of the Holy Father Pope Francis on World AIDS Day 2021, when he underlined the importance of remembering the many people who are affected by this virus: “For many of them, in some areas of the world, access to the necessary treatment is not available. My hope is that there might be a renewed commitment in solidarity to guarantee fair and effective health care.” Let us pray that our efforts today will contribute to transforming the vision of Pope Francis into a reality.

Thank you.