



**Remarks of His Excellency Archbishop Fortunatus Nwachukwu,
Apostolic Nuncio and Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations and
Specialized Agencies in Geneva, at the High-Level Dialogue
to Assess Progress on and Intensify Commitment to Scaling up Prevention,
Diagnosis and Treatment of Pediatric HIV and TB
5-7 December 2022, Casina Pio IV, Vatican City**

“The Holy See Commitment to Children”

Dear Friends,

I wish to begin by expressing thanks to the organizers for their kind invitation to join this gathering convened to expand the commitment of multilateral agencies, States, the private sector, civil society, and religious leaders and institutions to end the tragic loss of life caused by HIV and TB while effective treatment and diagnosis of these conditions are now available in all parts of the world. Your previous efforts, through the development and implementation of the Rome Action Plan, already have increased research and development of diagnostic tools and medications which are better adapted for pediatric use. Yet, we already have heard the challenges which still need to be confronted, and thus I wish to thank the structures of the Holy See that offer us this occasion to continue our dialogue and to strategize on effective practical actions to reach the set goals.

The topic assigned to me is to discuss the Holy See’s commitment to children. Such commitment is based on the Gospel message and example of Jesus who, as a twelve-year-old child Himself, had the courage to address the Jewish religious leaders in the Temple of Jerusalem about the love and care for all people by His Father in heaven (Lk 2:48-50). During His public ministry, Jesus instructed His apostles: “Let the little children come to me... for to such belongs the Kingdom of God” (Mk 10:14). Children, especially newborns, embody in their nature (not necessarily in their behaviour, cf. Mt 11:16-17) the ontological characteristics that mark the true disciples of Jesus, who merit the Kingdom of Heaven (newness or renewal, chastity, nudity or detachment, smallness or humility, sense of belonging, trustful dependence or recognition of our fragility and need for others). Jesus also engaged children in conversation and enlightened their minds about their unique dignity since they, like all of us, have been made in the image and likeness of God.

We also read in the Sacred Scriptures that Jesus went about healing the sick and those in distress (Mt 9:35; Acts 10:38).

The earliest Christian communities appointed deacons to take special care of the widows and orphans among them (Acts 6:1-7), and this practice eventually led the Church to establish a wide range of care structures to serve the most vulnerable members of the human family, without regard to ethnicity, nationality, race, or religious affiliation; surely, among the most prioritized for such care were children, especially the sick and/or those unprotected by biological parents or guardians. The Report of the Statistical Office of the Holy See for 2022 estimates almost 20,000 hospitals and dispensaries, most of which include specialized maternity and pediatric care, as well as another 20,000 child-care services under the auspices of local Catholic Church structures in every region of the world.¹ A number of such structures raised a clarion call for more effective and readily accessible and affordable diagnostic tools and medications for pediatric HIV and TB care and this indeed led to the Action Plan about which we are convening today.

With its Observer status at the United Nations Organization and with its full membership in some of the Specialized Agencies, the Holy See was one of the earliest signatories to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. In its reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Holy See has prioritized responses to health care needs of children, including those related to pediatric HIV and TB. The Permanent Mission of the Holy See in Geneva has followed very closely the efforts that led to the Rome Action Plan. In 2018, the *Caritas in Veritate Foundation*, which is closely associated with the Holy See Mission in Geneva, published a comprehensive working paper entitled *Universal Access to Medicines, Ethical Reflections on Ending Pediatric HIV*, with expert contributions from many of the participants in the present High-Level Dialogue.

Pope Francis, and his predecessors, have consistently maintained the need for States to respect the right to health and medical care, as included within the more general rubric of the right to “enjoy an adequate standard of living”² in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The various Missions of the Holy See to the UN and other multilateral agencies take every occasion to speak of such obligations during intergovernmental meetings related to health, trade, intellectual property, and development.

¹ *Annuario Statistico della Chiesa*, Vatican City, 2022.

² Article 25 UDHR: “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control”.

Let us hope that this present dialogue will renew and strengthen your determination to provide early diagnosis and treatment to children living with HIV and TB and to prevent vertical infection by providing similar medical attention to pregnant women. These words which Pope Francis addressed early this year to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See could be helpful to guide your conversation: “... *a comprehensive commitment on the part of the international community is necessary, so that the entire world population can have equal access to essential medical care and vaccines ... I reiterate my appeal that governments and concerned private entities demonstrate a sense of responsibility, developing a coordinated response at every level (local, national, regional, global), through new models of solidarity and tools to strengthen the capabilities of those countries in greatest need.*”³

³ Pope Francis, Address to the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See, 10 January 2022, Vatian City.