



Statement of the Holy See at the 76th World Health Assembly
21 – 30 May 2023 - Geneva
Agenda Item 3: General Debate
following the Report of the Director General

“WHO at 75: Saving lives, driving health for all”

Geneva, 24 May 2023

Mister President,

My delegation wishes to express its sincere recognition of this Organization’s continuing efforts to work with States in order to achieve the principal theme of this 76th Assembly, that is, “Saving Lives and Driving health for all”. Pope Francis himself serves as a strong advocate and promoter of health care for all, which is an important aspect of the fight against inequality. He maintains, indeed, that *“as long as the problems of the poor are not radically resolved by [...] attacking the structural causes of inequality, no solution will be found for the world’s problems or, for that matter, to any problems.”*¹

As we celebrate the 75th Anniversary of this Organization, let us recall the challenging question, posed by Pope Pius XII, to the participants at the 1949 World Health Assembly, when he received them in private audience in the Vatican City: How could we *“find it tolerable to see our brothers and sisters suffering from diseases and physical defects, sometimes serious enough to bring them to extinction, while many other societies in the world have reached such a degree of good health that early deaths have progressively diminished and one-time unyielding plagues are now gradually*

¹ Pope Francis, *Evangelium Gaudium*, #202,
https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html

giving way?” Pope Pacelli acknowledged then WHO’s broad definition of health as going beyond “the simple exclusion of bodily sickness and physical impairment” and affirmed that “the social doctrine of the Catholic Church lets no doubt remain that health of body and mind [...] can contribute to establishing a most favorable atmosphere for people’s inner and mutual peace.”²

Mister President,

The Holy See would like to reaffirm today that *“it is up to each country to seek ‘strategies and resources in order to guarantee each person’s fundamental right to basic and decent healthcare (Message for the 31st World Day of the Sick)’ [...] [for] health is not a luxury, it is for all.”³* Therefore, my Delegation urges this Assembly to recognize that the goals of “Saving Lives and Driving Health for All” require *“men and women of good will, particularly those having political responsibilities, to safeguard the rights of those who are weakest”*, and thus, urgently appeals States to fulfill their *“... primary responsibility to ensure that citizens are assisted in every phase of human life, [from conception] until natural death, and to do so in a way that makes each feel accompanied and cared for, even in the most delicate moments of his or her life.”⁴*

Thank you, Mister President.

² Pope Pius, XII, Address to the World Health Assembly, Vatican City, 27 June 1949, https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/speeches/1949/documents/hf_p-xii_spe_19490627_sanita.html

³ Pope Francis, *Audience with representatives of the National Federation of the Associations of Medical Radiology Health Technicians and Technical, Rehabilitation and Prevention Health Professions*, 16 January 2023.

⁴ *Ibidem*.