



Statement of H.E. Archbishop Ettore Balestrero, Apostolic Nuncio
and Permanent Representative of the Holy See to the United Nations
and Other International Organizations in Geneva
at the 77th World Health Assembly, 27 May - 1 June 2024
Agenda Item 3: General Debate
following the Report of the Director General
“All for Health and Health for All”
Geneva, 29 May 2024

Mr. President,

My Delegation welcomes the principal theme of this 77th Assembly, “All for Health and Health for All”, which succinctly reflects the aim of all continuing efforts of this Organization. If the Covid-19 pandemic has taught us anything, it is that we cannot live without each other, or worse still, compete against each other. The theme of this year - with its focus on collective solidarity in the context of health - is therefore both necessary and timely.

Solidarity, Pope Francis reminds us, “refers to something much more than a few sporadic acts of generosity. It presumes the creation of a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few.”¹ It is not merely a question of helping others, it is a matter of justice. With regard to health, this requires the realisation of a culture of care, based on the recognition of the sacredness of life and of the inalienable dignity of each and every human person, and where the priority is always to save lives.

¹ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 188.

In this regard, the Holy See commends the efforts of States, with the support of the WHO Secretariat, to undertake two historic processes aimed at strengthening cooperation and making equity and solidarity a reality: the updating of the International Health Regulations and the development of a new “pandemic agreement”. While much consensus has been built during the long and intense negotiations of the past few months, no effort should be spared to further build agreement to meet the challenges. Nevertheless, it is essential to maintain the efforts made so far, recognizing that failure in this endeavor would affect mostly the poor and those in vulnerable situations.

Mr. President,

Providing nearly 25% of the world’s healthcare and as much as 40-70% in some of the poorest parts of the world, the Catholic Church remains committed to making “health for all” a reality.

Allow me to conclude by reaffirming that health is not a consumer good, but rather a universal right, and therefore access to healthcare services cannot be a privilege.² The Holy See urges States to work together to make this aspiration a concrete reality for all.

Thank you, Mr. President.

² Cf. Pope Francis, Audience to the Doctors with Africa CUAMM (Collegio Universitario Aspiranti e Medici Missionari), 7 May 2016.