



Statement by H.E. Archbishop Ivan Jurkovič, Permanent Representative of the Holy See to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva
to the 73rd World Health Assembly
18-19 May 2020

Mr. President,

These most unusual circumstances under which we are meeting, remote from the usual crowds at the Palais des Nations, and with such a truncated agenda, are a striking reminder of what Pope Francis has described as “the night of a world already faced with epochal challenges and now oppressed by a pandemic severely testing our whole human family.”¹

My delegation continues to take note of the efforts by the international community to mobilize emergency responses in every part of the world. This unprecedented situation brings a new light on the interdependence between Nations and in particular, on the necessity to consider health as a primary common good, which requires solidarity and coordinated action at the global level.

At the constant urging of Pope Francis, the Holy See remains adamant that “the most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters living in the cities and peripheries of every part of the world, not be abandoned.”² In fact, many countries are highly exposed to the consequences of this crisis, which might trigger further starvation and instability, especially in those regions already hit by ongoing situations of emergency.

¹ Pope Francis, Urbi et Orbi Message, 12 April 2020, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/urbi/documents/papa-francesco_20200412_urbi-et-orbi-pasqua.html

² *Ibid.*

Throughout the world, some 5,000 Catholic-inspired hospitals, and more than 16,000 Church-based dispensaries,³ are complementing and reinforcing the efforts of governments to provide healthcare to all, by assuring that the poorest and most marginalized persons “do not lack basic necessities ... such as medicine and especially the possibility of adequate health care.”⁴ In many places, the Church has made its facilities available to support the global response to the pandemic of Covid-19. Since the beginning of the outbreak, many religious orders, parishes and priests have been on the frontlines, caring for those who have been infected and their families. Moreover, the Holy See has pledged to contribute to the WHO Emergency Fund for the supply of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to frontline medical workers and has already made various donations to the regions in need of urgent help. The participation of the Church in this common effort was recently reinforced with the creation of the *Vatican Covid-19 Commission* by Pope Francis. It has already launched several projects to bring help to those populations most affected by the pandemic. In this period of suffering and adversity, my Delegation has also appreciated the efforts of the World Health Organization to remain in dialogue with religious leaders and religious-inspired organizations in the common effort to ensure that religious gatherings are held with all the necessary sanitary measures.

Mr. President,

In the midst of this pandemic, we are all provoked to generously bring the best of our abilities to tackle the pandemic in all its aspects and in every part of the world, and to look to the future with creativity and hope, so as to give witness to the concrete solidarity that is indispensable for addressing the global challenges of our times. Certain decisions at the international level will have an important impact on the physical and mental health of populations that were already living under difficult humanitarian circumstances even before the pandemic. In this regard, the Holy See would like to reiterate its strong support for the Secretary General’s appeal for an “immediate global ceasefire in all corners of the world.” This necessarily includes “ceasing all forms of hostility, promoting the creation of humanitarian aid routes, openness to

³ *Le Statistiche della Chiesa Cattolica*, Agenzia FIDES, 20 Ottobre 2019.

⁴ Pope Francis, *Urbi et Orbi Message*, 12 April 2020.

diplomacy, and attentiveness to those who are in situations of great vulnerability.”⁵ In a similar way, Pope Francis also called for “international sanctions [to] be relaxed, since these make it difficult for countries on which they have been imposed to provide adequate support to their citizens.”⁶

I conclude, Mr. President, by relaying the fervent hope of Pope Francis that the heightened research motivated by the COVID-19 pandemic will be conducted “in a transparent and disinterested way, in order to find vaccines and treatments and to guarantee universal access to essential technologies that will enable every infected person, in every part of the world, to receive the necessary health care.”⁷

Thank you, Mr. President.

⁵ Pope Francis, Angelus, 29 March 2020, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/angelus/2020/documents/papa-francesco_angelus_20200329.html

⁶ Pope Francis, Urbi et Orbi Message, 12 April 2020.

⁷ Pope Francis, Regina Caeli, 03 May 2020, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/angelus/2020/documents/papa-francesco_regina-coeli_20200503.html.