



Statement by H.E. Archbishop Ivan Jurkovič, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva at the 140th meeting of the Executive Board of the World Health Organization 23 January to 1 February 2017 on Agenda Item 8.7

“Promoting the health of migrants”

Mr. Chairman,

The delegation of the Holy See recognizes the urgency of greater attention and action to promote the health of migrants. The Secretariat Report offers a comprehensive summary of the numbers of forced migrants in the world today and of the root causes of such migratory phenomena.

The recent UN General Assembly Summit on addressing large movements of refugees and migrants focused on the responsibilities of the international community, of individual States, and of civil society and delineated principles and recommendations to be implemented at all stages of the migratory journey undertaken by such persons, forced to flee their home territories in search of protection, welcome, and dignified living conditions. During this post-Summit period, States are engaged in efforts to fulfil their commitment to develop two Compacts - one on refugees and the other on safe, orderly, and regular migration - by the year 2018.

In this regard, the delegation of the Holy See urges that, in the course of such considerations, we “move beyond mere statistics” with deep sensitivity to the fact “that each refugee and migrant has a name, a face, and a story, as well

as an inalienable right to live in peace and to aspire to a better future for their sons and daughters.”¹ In the context of this agenda item, such persons must be assured of the right to enjoy the “highest attainable standard of physical and mental health”, as delineated in the WHO Constitution.

On this year’s annual World Day of Migrants and Refugees, Pope Francis drew attention to the reality of child migrants, especially those who travel alone. He asked everyone “to take care of the young, who in a threefold way are defenceless: they are children, they are foreigners, and they have no means to protect themselves.” They need proper and respectful care, which must include adequate food, clothing, safe and healthy lodging.

The Secretariat Report includes ample evidence regarding the significant vulnerability of migrants to both physical and emotional disorders. Moreover, such persons are often denied access to both emergency and basic health care. When such care is available, it often is interrupted due to the displacement migrants inevitably experience before a durable solution can be found for them. Moreover, many local health systems do not have the capacity to address the health needs of forced migrants, or such persons are confronted with rejection or discrimination as a result of cultural and linguistic differences with host populations.

While the Secretariat Report focused mainly on the need to improve state-provided health care for refugees and migrants, it seems important to acknowledge the key role that is played by non-State actors, such as the Catholic Church and other religious organizations, that are deeply engaged in humanitarian and integration activities, including health care, to benefit forcibly displaced persons.

¹ Pope Francis, Address to the Members of the European Confederation and of the World Union of Jesuit Alumni and Alumnae, Vatican City, 17 September 2016, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/september/documents/papa-francesco_20160917_ex-alumni-gesuiti.html

Mr. Chairman,

“Migration movements ... are on such a scale that only a systematic and active cooperation between States and international organizations can be capable of regulating and managing such movements effectively.”² The Delegation of the Holy See urges WHO, UNHCR, IOM, and other relevant agencies to advocate for greater attention and action to safeguard and protect the health of migrants and to include practical, accountable, and sustainable plans to achieve this aim within the Compacts on Refugees and on Migrants that will soon be negotiated, since “... a more decisive and constructive action is required, one which relies on a universal network of cooperation, based on safeguarding the dignity and centrality of every human person.”³

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

² Pope Francis, Message for the 101st World Day of Refugees and Migrants (2015), Vatican City, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/papa-francesco_20140903_world-migrants-day-2015.html

³ *Ibid.*