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Statement by Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher at the High-Level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage (21 September 2023)

The following is the statement given yesterday by Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher, Secretary for Relations with States and International Organizations of the Secretariat of State, at the High-Level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage (21 September 2023):

Statement by Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher

Statement by H.E. Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher,

Secretary for Relations with States and International Organizations of the Holy See,

at the High-level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage (21 September 2023)

Mr. President,

“Health is not a luxury; it is for all.”[1] Yet, despite progress in expanding access to quality and affordable healthcare, it remains out of reach for far too many, particularly in developing countries. Achieving universal health coverage requires strategies and resources, including support for health workers, to realize each person’s fundamental right to quality healthcare,[2] including the poorest and those living in rural areas.

The effects of poverty, such as hunger and malnutrition, inadequate housing, and unsafe working conditions, increase vulnerability to disease while making it harder for the poor to get the necessary care they need. Moreover, it is deeply troubling that healthcare costs have caused half a billion people to experience or fall deeper into extreme poverty.[3] For that reason, ensuring affordable, universal access to quality healthcare cannot be separated from broader development efforts, particularly social protection, education, and decent work.

Mr. President,

Faith has inspired many efforts to care for the poor and vulnerable around the world. In some places, faith-based organizations are the only healthcare providers. Approximately one quarter of all healthcare facilities worldwide are Catholic, and were “created precisely to care for those no-one wanted to touch”[4], often in challenging situations. In light of this, the Holy See’s Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development launched in 2021 an initiative on water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in Catholic healthcare facilities. Projects are now underway in different parts of the world, and will help to reduce the spread of infectious disease and end preventable maternal and newborn deaths. [5]

Mr. President,

I wish to underline that faith-based healthcare also witnesses to the inalienable dignity of the person, which must be at the center of efforts to achieve universal health coverage, by focusing on healing and accompanying each person in his or her totality.

In doing so, we cannot ignore the danger of an increasingly consumerist approach, where doctors act as mere service providers to wealthy clients, fulfilling and profiting from their individual desires. Such tendencies can create a certain contempt for the poor, the sick, the unborn, the disabled and the elderly, forgetting that human beings are fragile, dependent and limited in their corporeality.

To that end, the Holy See pledges to continue its efforts in promoting universal health coverage, in particular, “to answer above all to the healthcare demands of the poorest, the excluded and those, who for economic or cultural reasons, see that their needs are not met”[6].

Thank you, Mr. President.

[1]Pope Francis, *Address to representatives of the National Federation of the Associations of Medical Radiology Health Technicians and Technical, Rehabilitation and Prevention Health Professions*, 16 January 2023.

[2] Cf. Pope Francis, *Message on the XXXI World Day of the Sick*, 11 February 2023.

[3]Cf. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2021/12/12/more-than-half-a-billion-people-pushed-into-extreme-poverty-due-to-health-care-costs>.

[4] Pope Francis, *Address to members of the Religious Association of Social and Health Institutes (ARIS)*, 13 April 2023.

[5] Cf. <https://www.humandevlopment.va/en/progetti/wash-water-sanitation-hygiene.html>

[6] Pope Francis, *Address to members of the Religious Association of Social and Health Institutes (ARIS)*, 13 April 2023.
