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STATEMENT OF THE HOLY SEE DELEGATION AT THE 64th SESSION OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION OF COMMITMENT ON HIV/AIDS

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Here below the Statement by H.E. Archbishop Celestino Migliore, Apostolic Nuncio, Permanent Observer of the Holy See, before the plenary on Item 44: Implementation of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS and the Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS: Report of the Secretary-General (A/64/735) and draft decision (A/64/L54/Rev.1):

Mr. President,

In the 2001 Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, Heads of State and Government acknowledged with urgent concern that the spread of HIV constituted "a global emergency and one of the most formidable challenges to human life and dignity" as well as a serious obstacle to the realization of the internationally agreed development goals (A/RES/S-26/2). Five years later in the Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS they noted with alarm that one quarter of a century into this scourge we are still facing an "unprecedented human catastrophe" (A/RES/60/262). On both occasions they made a commitment to take the necessary action to combat this serious threat to the human community.

Given the significant engagement of Catholic Church-sponsored organizations in providing care in all parts of the world for those with HIV/AIDS, my delegation takes this occasion to note that the global community continues to be confronted by many obstacles in its efforts to respond adequately to this problem, for example, that 7,400 people become infected with HIV every day; that nearly four million people are currently receiving treatment, while 9.7 million people are still in need of such life-saving and life-prolonging interventions; and that for every two people who commence treatment, 5 more become infected (*UNAIDS: Country and regional responses to AIDS*).

Mr. President,

If AIDS is to be combated by realistically facing its deeper causes and the sick are to be given the loving care they need, we need to provide people with more than knowledge, ability, technical competence and tools. For this reason my delegation strongly recommends that more attention and resources be dedicated to support a value-based approach grounded in the human dimension of sexuality, that is to say, a spiritual and human renewal that leads to a new way of behaving toward others. The spread of AIDS can be stopped effectively, as has been affirmed also by public health experts, when this respect for the dignity of human nature and for its inherent moral law is included as an essential element in HIV prevention efforts.

My delegation is deeply concerned about the gap in available funds for antiretroviral treatment among poor and marginalized populations. Catholic Church-related providers in Uganda, South Africa, Haiti, and Papua New Guinea, among others, report that international donors have instructed them not to enroll new patients into these programs and express concern about further cutbacks even for those already receiving such treatment. The global community carries a serious responsibility to offer equitable and continuous access to such medications. Failure to do so will not only cause untold loss and suffering to those individuals and families directly affected by the disease but also will have grave public health, social, and economic consequences for the entire human family.

Particularly vulnerable are children living with HIV or HIV/TB co-infection. Access to early diagnosis and treatment is far less accessible to HIV-positive children than adults; without such access at least one-third of such children die before their first birthday and at least one-half die before their second birthday. Such loss of the future generations and leaders can no longer be met with silence or indifference.

Mr. President,

Through their global commitments in 2001 and 2006, Heads of State and Government articulated a vision of equitable access as well as comprehensive and effective action in response to the global HIV spread. The present-day challenges call into question our ability to fulfill such promises. Yet, in the face of the ongoing threat of HIV and AIDS, we must acknowledge the demands of the human family for worldwide solidarity, for honest evaluation of past approaches that may have been based more on ideology than on science and values, and for determined action that respects human dignity and promotes the integral development of each and every person and of all society.

Thank you, Mr. President.

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