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Faith-based groups in Rome to discuss early diagnosis and treatment of children with HIV

Vatican City, 11 April 2016 – Caritas has invited faith-based groups to Rome to lay the groundwork for a "roadmap" for greater engagement in the diagnosis and treatment of children with HIV.

Last year the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) announced that the milestone of placing 15 million people worldwide on anti-retroviral treatment (ART) had been reached. However, only one-third of children with HIV are diagnosed and treated.

Faith-based organisations form a vast grass-roots network and are a vital source of care for children and mothers living with HIV. Caritas has joined forces with UNAIDS, the U.S. President's "Plan for AIDS relief" (PEPFAR) and the Vatican's Bambino Gesù Paediatric Hospital to provide faith-based organisations the opportunity to discuss their past successes and challenges, as well as their potential for better diagnosis and treatment for children.

The meeting, the theme of which will be "Strengthening the engagement of faith-based organisations in the early diagnosis and treatment for children living with HIV", will take place in the Bambino Gesù Paediatric Hospital and will be attended by, among others: Archbishop Zygmunt Zimowski, president of the Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care, who opened the proceedings this morning; Cardinal John Onaiyekan, archbishop of Abuya, Nigeria, who will speak this afternoon on the ethical imperatives for universal access to diagnosis and treatment of HIV and other co-infections; Dr. Luiz Loures, deputy director for Programmes, UNAIDS; and Ambassador Deborah Birx, global AIDS coordinator and director, PEPFAR. They will be accompanied by scientists and advocates committed to expanding treatment access for children, along with representatives of both national and local Catholic-inspired, ecumenical, and inter-faith organisations engaged in HIV care and persons living with HIV.