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Message of the Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development for World Antibiotic Awareness Week

The following is the Message of the prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, His Eminence Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson, for World Antibiotic Awareness Week (WAAW), which takes place from 12 to 18 November 2018, on the theme *Limiting the Emergence and Spread of Antimicrobial Resistance – A Call to Action*:

Message

Limiting the Emergence and Spread of Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR): A Call to Action

The World Antibiotic Awareness Week (WAAW), which takes place each November is an occasion to reiterate the urgent and global importance of this growing public health problem. The aim of this initiative is to “increase global awareness of antibiotic resistance (AMR) and to encourage best practices among the general public, health workers and policy makers to avoid the further emergence and spread of antibiotic resistance.”[1]

Since their discovery, antibiotics have served as the cornerstone of modern medicine and have transformed human health by saving millions of lives and alleviating much human suffering. “However, the persistent overuse and misuse of antibiotics in human and animal health have encouraged the emergence and spread of AMR, which occurs when microbes, such as bacteria, become resistant to the drugs used to treat them.”[2] Unfortunately, the problem is growing worse and is propagated among others, by the inadequate programs for infection prevention and control, poor-quality medicines, insufficient regulation of the use of antimicrobial medicines in human and animal food, agriculture and aquaculture sectors, as well as lack of access to healthcare services, including diagnostics and laboratory tests, contamination of soil water, and crops with antimicrobial residues.

Antimicrobial resistance poses a great challenge to global public health today, for it threatens the effective

prevention and treatment of a growing number of infections caused by bacteria, parasites, viruses and fungi. If left unaddressed, the continued emergence and spread of drug-resistant diseases will put at risk the effectiveness of modern medicine and is therefore a challenge to the health and development of nations. It makes it more difficult to safeguard the health and well-being of people most vulnerable to life-threatening infections, especially women giving birth, newborns, patients with certain chronic diseases and those undergoing chemotherapy or surgery.”[3] It also is a threat to “hundreds of millions of people who have no access to health care and are most susceptible to diseases related to antimicrobial resistance.”[4]

As Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, I join the International Community to make this urgent call to action in order to limit the emergence and spread of antimicrobial resistance.

Yes our time is running out and we must act to initiate and animate the necessary behavior change; to strengthen awareness and action on infection prevention and control; and promote the appropriate stewardship of antimicrobials.

In this regard, the tens of thousands of Church-sponsored health care institutions and education centers and other faith based organizations are well positioned to encourage ongoing support, “mobilize individual and community action and advance social and medical practices to combat the emergence and spread of AMR...Faith communities, both at institutional and local levels, are well positioned to promote several effective and sustainable initiatives to address the problem.”[5]

While entrusting the clinical setting to the experts, I wish to point out some of those initiatives identified by Faith Based Organizations, for the engagement of communities in achieving immediate and sustained behavior change in order to reduce the emergence and spread of AMR:

- “Enhance awareness and education on methods to prevent and control infections;
- Create understanding of the individual and community impact of the misuses of and self-medication with antimicrobials;
- Build trust within the community to enhance surveillance and improve infections prevention and control, particularly trust in vaccines;
- Enable reliable and sustainable access to, and use of, water, sanitation, and hygiene.”[6]

These and other initiatives identified by policy makers and public health authorities, can indeed trigger the much needed behavior change in the communities, to address the emergence and spread of antimicrobial resistance. To the Blessed Virgin Mary, *Salus Infirmorum*, I entrust all our efforts to address this public health challenge of our times.

Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson

[1] WHO, Campaigns/World Antibiotic Awareness Week, 12-18 November 2018.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] Card. Parolin, *Statement on Antimicrobial Resistance*, UN High-Level meeting, New York, 21 September 2016.

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] Workshop for Catholic-inspired and other faith-based organizations, *Combating the Emergence and Spread of Antimicrobial Resistance: A Workshop to Strengthen Faith-Based Engagement*, Rome Italy, December 12-15, 2016.

[6] *Ibid.*
