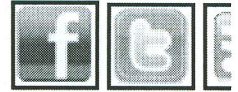


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VATICAN – Nearly 2 billion people without access to basic medicine

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VATICAN – Nearly 2 billion people without access to basic medicine

Geneva (Agenzia Fides) – “The Catholic Church provides a major contribution to health care in all parts of the world – through local churches, religious institutions and private initiatives, which act on their own responsibility and in the respect of the law of each country – including the promotion of 5,378 hospitals, 18,088 dispensaries and clinics, 521 leprosaria, and 15,448 homes for the aged, the chronically ill, or disabled people.” These were the words of Archbishop Silvano M. Tomasi, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the Office of the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva, in his speech delivered on June 8, during the General Debate Item 3 of the 14th Session of the UN Human Rights Council, during which he focused largely on the need to ensure universal access to medicines and diagnostic tools to all people. The Archbishop stressed that from the reports from those actually operating in the territory in some communities, among the poorest, marginalized, and isolated, it is clear that the rights outlined in international documents “far from being realized.”

“One major impediment to the realization of these rights is the lack of access to affordable medicines and diagnostic tools,” said Archbishop Tomasi, who proceeded in recalling that the “diseases of poverty” still account for 50 percent of the burden of disease in developing countries, nearly ten times higher than in developed countries; more than 100 million people fall into poverty annually because they have to pay for health care; in developing countries, patients themselves pay for 50 to 90 per cent of essential medicines; nearly 2 billion people lack access to essential medicines.

“One group particularly deprived of access to medicines is that of children. Many essential medicines have not been developed in appropriate formulations or dosages specific to pediatric use... This situation can result in the tragic loss of life or continued chronic illness among such needy children. For example, of the 2.1 million children estimated to be living with HIV infection, only 38% were received life-saving anti-retroviral medications at the end of 2008. This treatment gap is partially due to the lack of “child friendly” medications to treat the HIV infection.”

The Permanent Observer of the Holy See explained that his delegation is well aware of the complexities inherent in the intellectual property aspects related to the issue of access to medicines. However, he also urged the Council “to renew its commitment as a key stakeholder in efforts to assert and safeguard the right to health by guaranteeing equitable access to essential medicines.” (SL) (Agenzia Fides 09/06/2010)

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