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Vatican committed to universal health care coverage

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Archbishop Zygmunt Zimowski, president of the Pontifical Council for Health Care Ministry (CNS file photo/Paul Haring)

Vatican City -- Archbishop Zygmunt Zimowski, head of the Holy See delegation to the 65th World Health Assembly, on Wednesday delivered an address before that gathering, which is being held in Geneva, Switzerland, until Saturday. Speaking English, the archbishop reaffirmed the Holy See's support for Resolution WHA64.9 on "sustainable health financing structures and universal coverage," which urges member States to aim for affordable universal coverage and access for all citizens on the basis of equity and solidarity.

He also recalled how Benedict XVI has emphasized the importance of establishing "real distributive justice which, on the basis of objective needs, guarantees adequate care to all. Consequently, if it is not to become inhuman, the world of healthcare cannot disregard the moral rules that must govern it."

Zimowski said "more countries, especially those with emerging economies, are moving towards universal coverage," thanks also to "good policies that promote equity. ... Therefore my delegation strongly believes that in the endeavor to promote universal coverage, fundamental values such as equity, human rights and social justice need to become explicit policy objectives," he said.

The archbishop made an appeal for high-income countries to show greater solidarity toward poorer nations in order to overcome funding shortfalls in health. In this context, he quoted the encyclical "Caritas in veritate" in which Benedict XVI writes, "More economically developed nations should do all they can to allocate larger portions of their gross domestic product to development aid, thus respecting the obligations that the international community has undertaken in this regard."

In conclusion, the head of the Holy See delegation affirmed that "progress towards universal coverage cannot be the effort of State machinery alone. It requires support from civil society. ... With over 120,000 social and healthcare institutions worldwide, the Catholic Church is in many developing countries one of the key partners of the State in healthcare delivery, providing services in remote areas to rural low-income populations, enabling them to access services that would otherwise be out of their reach. The efforts and contribution of such organizations and institutions towards universal access, merit the recognition and support of both the State and the international community, without obliging them to participate in activities they find morally abhorrent."

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