

Address of Welcome by S.E. Archbishop Zygmunt Zimowski,

President of the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers to participants at the consultation organized by UNAIDS and Caritas Internationalis on the basis of the initiative of UNAIDS, “Treatment 2015”.

Il Cantico Hotel, Rome, February 25 2014

Excellencies,

Distinguished representatives of various Catholic organizations and other faith organizations involved in the fight against HIV/AIDS, Dear Participants,

I would first like to thank the Secretary General of Caritas Internationalis, Mr. Michel Roy, for inviting me to participate in this consultation organized by UNAIDS and Caritas Internationalis, based on the initiative of UNAIDS, “Treatment 2015”. In this regard, I thank the Deputy Executive Director of UNAIDS and Under Secretary of the United Nations, Mr. Luiz Loures, for wanting the collaboration of faith communities in this effort that aims to save and improve the lives of millions of people and thousands of families, often poor and marginalized.

A sincere thanks to all the organizers, the United States Embassy to the Santa Sede for its support to this meeting, and in particular to Bishop Robert Vitorio for the great work organization and for their commitment to the realization of this consultation.

The statistics relating to access to antiretroviral treatment show that we are still far from universal coverage. In 2012, about 9.7 million people had access to antiretroviral treatment, and today approximately 25.9 million people are in need of these life saving treatment. This makes the goal of UNAIDS to reach at least 15 million sufferers by 2015 an urgent task, as well as a challenge that can not leave us in peace, because it is life and not mere numbers.

The Catholic Church has always been involved in the fight against the disease HIV/AIDS and the care of people affected by it, because of the widespread presence of its facilities in the field and various faith organizations who work there, some of which are present at this meeting to offer its own contribution. To them I extend my heartfelt thanks and appreciation for the tireless work, along with

thousands of brothers and sisters who are sick and suffering, and I urge you to not be discouraged by difficulties, but always leave you inspired by your Master, Jesus the Good Samaritan, who calls every day to take care of your neighbor (Lk 10, 37). The job of ensuring access to antiretroviral treatment must go hand in hand with the commitment to effective prevention, to be implemented through education to a change of behavior, but also through the treatment of antiretroviral drugs, as well as in the prevention of vertical transmission of the virus.

Blessed John Paul II has always encouraged “everyone to work together, starting with specific expertise in the care of those who suffer from this disease by using the resources of science to alleviate their suffering.” Thus implementing a genuine concern for the sick, He founded in 2004 the Foundation “The Good Samaritan”, with the aim of ensuring the health and care of the sick, particularly the poor and needy. I can communicate with delight that currently, with the help of friends and with the collaboration of the local Church and civil institutions, is about to start a project of “Test and Treat” in the District of Shinyanga (Mwanza, Tanzania), which aims to guarantee the antiretroviral treatment to more than 120,000 people over five years.

The Pontifical Council for Operatori Sanitari, which I have the honor to preside, over the years it has occupied several times to this serious problem by organizing three Congresses on the subject: an International Conference in 1989, entitled: “Vivere, perché?”; a conference on “The Catholic Church and the challenge of HIV/AIDS,” which took place in 1999 and a study of the International Conference on: “the Centrality of Care person in the Prevention and Treatment of disease in HIV/AIDS”, organized in 2011.

The collaboration with institutions and Catholic organizations must take place for the sick, as Benedict XVI has reminded us, while respecting their needs. I would like to recall here the words of Pope Emeritus: “I renew my support and I call on all institutions and all the movements of the Church who work in the health sector and especially in AIDS. You have done a wonderful and important job. Ask international agencies to recognize you and help you in respect of your needs and in a spirit of collaboration. Encourage institutions and programs of pharmaceutical and therapeutic research currently underway to eradicate pandemics. Spare no efforts to achieve the results. Love the precious gift of life. May you find solutions to make accessible to all treatments and medicines, considering the numerous situations of need! The Church has long-supported the cause of a medical treatment of the highest quality and lower cost for all people involved.” In this regard, I think that this consultation will enroll between the various responses to

the appeal made by Pope Francis last World Day for the fight against HIV/AIDS, hoping that “every patient, without exception, have access to the care of he needs.”

The infection of HIV/AIDS is a pandemic that can be won by an alliance, built and developed between men and women of good will who, guided by ethical principles and values, to come as an ultimate goal of their actions the service to life, the life of all men and of every man. The main subject of attention and concern is the person, especially when it’s the experience of illness and suffering and “becomes in a special way the way of the Church. “Must therefore be put at the center of our action the sick person, his dignity, their needs and rights, its relational attitude, his lifestyle, his relationships, family and community, his place in society.

With these brief but heartfelt considerations, I wish all the participants a fruitful consultation on behalf of people living with HIV/AIDS, who are eagerly awaiting worldwide effective treatment, which can still give them a longer life expectancy.