Statement by H.E. Archbishop Ivan Jurkovič, Permanent Representative of the Holy See to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva to the 74th World Health Assembly
24 May – 01 June 2021

Mr. President,

The continuing challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic have revealed "the face of a world that is seriously ill … in its natural environment, its economic and political processes, and even more in its human relationships".[1] There is no doubt that this pandemic has resulted in an enormous loss of life, economic instability, and challenges to the emotional and spiritual wellbeing of many in every corner of the world. We must admit in all honesty, however, that the greatest impact has been felt among the poor and most marginalized members of the human family. For these reasons, the Holy See urges "political and government leaders [to] work, above all, to ensure universal access to basic healthcare."[2]

Already in 1949, Pope Pius XII raised the same concerns when he addressed the participants in the 1949 World Health Assembly, saying: "*Could we find it tolerable to see our brothers and sisters suffering from diseases and physical defects, sometimes serious enough to bring them to extinction, while many other societies in the world have reached such a degree of good health?*"[3] He further acknowledged that neither vigilance efforts, nor care or national institutions may suffice to end the ever increasing health risks, unless general and concerted action is ensured.

[1] Pope Francis, Address to the Members of the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See, Vatican City, 8 February 2021.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] Pope Pius XII, Address to the World Health Assembly's participants, Vatican City, 27 June 1949.

In today's challenging period for multilateralism, the Holy See considers it timely to formalize its longstanding participation in the World Health Organization. In this regard, the adoption of the resolution tabled by Italy would reaffirm the values and interests shared by the Holy See and by this Organization: the protection of health, the promotion of internationally recognized human rights and the service of the common good.

Mr. President,

In hindsight, we must acknowledge that we were not adequately prepared to prevent, or even to react to**,** the COVID-19 pandemic in time to save the lives and health of millions of people throughout the world. In this context, Pope Francis *"… encourage[s] all States to contribute actively to the international efforts being made to ensure an equitable distribution of the vaccines, based not on purely economic criteria but on the needs of all, especially of peoples most in need*.[4]"

Thank you.

[4] Pope Francis, *op.cit.*