



The Holy See

*Message of His Holiness Paul VI to Dr. Marcolino Candau,
Director-General of the World Health Organization, on its 20th anniversary**

At this time when the World Health Organization is preparing solemnly to commemorate twentieth anniversary of its founding, it is a special pleasure for us to express the respect we feel for this international organization and all those who so generously unite their research and efforts to help in this difficult task.

Within the family of the United Nations the World Health Organization has a fundamental place, even if its action is not as fully known as it deserves to be. What would be the task of "the integral development of man and the united development of mankind" (*Populorum Progressio*, no. 5), if it did not imply that every human being enjoy good health, this "state of complete physical, mental and social well-being", as defined so well by the WHO Constitution? Pope Pius XII when on June 27, 1949 he received the participants in the second World Health Assembly, forcefully affirmed this concept: "The Church, far from considering health as a subject of the exclusively biological order, has always emphasized the importance of religious and moral forces in order to maintain health and has always numbered among the conditions requisite for the dignity and the complete well-being of human beings, their corporal and spiritual, temporal and eternal good". (*L'Osservatore Romano*, June 29, 1949). And our venerable predecessor, John XXIII, in his encyclical *Pacem in Terris* cited among the universal, inviolable and inalienable rights of human beings the right to life and physical integrity, while we ourselves, in our encyclical *Populorum Progressio* emphasized how much the battle against endemic diseases and access for all to health is one of the aspirations of present-day man (nn. 1 and 6). We can only rejoice that this anniversary of the founding of WHO is celebrated this year, when the whole world is invited to honour human rights more authentically. The profoundly charitable mission of your Organization will thus, no doubt, be emphasized and its action approved even more wholeheartedly.

The fight against disease, in all its forms, throughout the world, entails difficult, costly operations which are demanding of men and resources both for laboratory research and all the health campaigns launched in the furthest corners of the globe. This activity can bear fruit only if we all

unanimously cooperate and if there is a fertile dialogue between experts and those they come to relieve. For the Christian, it means following Christ Who, during His life-time, never ceased to deplore human misery and sought to alleviate and heal it. And every man of good will who ponders the moving parable of the good Samaritan, will surely also be induced to "love and help each and everyone as his neighbour, his brother" (ibid., n. 82), bringing him help without sparing efforts. We also wish to honor the work of mercy done by WHO, and all those who support its activity, and thus facilitate its effectiveness.

Let it also be understood by all responsible parties that any reduction in governmental budgets for public health will unfailingly affect the most needy and the most disinherited. Finally, it is certainly obvious that for the young nations, where health problems are often serious and perplexing, one of the most necessary tasks – among other urgent ones – is the training of a sufficient number of competent persons, from among their citizens, to meet their health needs. This task cannot be improvised; it requires courageous choices and demands disinterested support from the more favoured countries. It demands also an awakening of the consciences of individuals who will not hesitate to sacrifice legitimate aspirations of their own prosperity, in order to dedicate themselves to restore health to people condemned to premature death, if no one comes to their aid. Is not this the best proof of the moral development of mankind, that the more fortunate members of the human family lend themselves to the service of their brothers in pain and need?

The impetus given to WHO during these last two decades by its directors, members and experts, and the extent and quality of the work done, are pledges that this great international Organization will continue to pursue this activity in favour of mankind in full respect of the laws of its nature, as established by its Creator. In forming this wish, we call down the fullness of divine blessings on all those who, under the auspices of WHO, work in the service of health for all mankind.

*ORa n.7 p.3.

Paths to Peace p.453-454.