



Statement by His Excellency Archbishop Ivan Jurkovič
Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the UN and Other International Organizations in Geneva
at the Interactive Dialogue on Human Rights - 33rd Session of the Human Rights Council
Geneva, 16 September 2016

Mr. President,

The Delegation of the Holy See would like to express its deep concern that approximately 783 million people lack access to safe drinking water and that more than 2.5 billion do not have access to basic sanitation. Moreover, globally, one-third of all schools lack access to safe water and sanitation, and 160 million children suffer from stunting and chronic malnutrition linked to such problems.¹

Resolution 64/292 of the United Nations General Assembly recognizes the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights. In September of last year, the *2030 Agenda* recognized water and sanitation as a core issue, established a dedicated Sustainable Development Goal 6 on water and sanitation, clear linkages to Goals relating to health, food security, climate change, resilience to disasters and ecosystems, among many others. In order to reach the ambitious objectives of the *2030 Agenda*, we must address universal access to drinking water and sanitation as well as issues of quality and supply, in tandem with improved water management to protect ecosystems and build resilience.

Our world has a grave social debt toward the poor who lack access to drinking water, because they are denied the right to a life consistent with their inalienable dignity. Sustainable development and human rights perspectives both call for reducing inequalities and eliminating disparities in access to basic services. In this regard, the sustainable management of water becomes a social, economic, environmental and ethical challenge that involves not only institutions, but also the whole of society.

The intense and indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources results in grave situations of irreversible degradation and threatens the survival of future generations on this Earth. Reckless choices continue today and result in increasing exploitation of energy and natural resources, located in the poorest countries, to the economic advantage of many industrialized nations. In his Encyclical Letter, *Caritas in Veritate*, Pope Benedict XVI observed that “[t]he stockpiling of natural resources, which in many cases are found in the poor countries themselves, gives rise to exploitation and frequent conflicts between and within nations.”²

As stated by Pope Francis last year at the UN General Assembly, the pillars of integral human development, namely, “housing, dignified and properly remunerated employment, adequate

¹ Cfr. http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/monitoring/jmp-2015-update/en/

² Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 49.

food and drinking water, religious freedom and, more generally, spiritual freedom and education – have a common foundation – the right to life and, more generally, what we could call the right to existence of human nature itself.”³ Today, it is impossible to talk about "common good without taking into account the right to live in a healthy environment. The fight against poverty and hunger requires more and more targeted intervention and solidarity in order to guarantee universal access to water. The promotion of integral human development, especially for those engaged in agriculture, requires proper management of water resources. Thus the Catholic Church teaches that “[b]y its very nature water cannot be treated as just another commodity among many, and it must be used rationally and in solidarity with others. The distribution of water is traditionally among the responsibilities that fall to public agencies, since water is considered a public good. If water distribution is entrusted to the private sector it should still be considered a public good. The right to water, as all human rights, finds its basis in human dignity and not in any kind of merely quantitative assessment that considers water as a merely economic good. Without water, life is threatened. Therefore, the right to safe drinking water is a universal and inalienable right.”⁴

Mr. President, my Delegation would like to recall that, in order to promote and attain the common good, it is necessary to protect and promote the right to water as a “duty of the civil authorities”. To reaffirm human dignity and the common good of the whole human family, we must promote a wise hierarchy of priorities for the use of water, especially where there are multiple and potentially competing demands for water.

Therefore, policies are needed that will protect this good in today’s circumstances. In this regard, the Holy See is aware that situations vary greatly and thus urges the planning of policies that are valid and effective for the different contexts. The International Community has to face the urgent moral need for a new solidarity with regard to natural resources. This change can only be achieved through motivation and education of youth to embrace solidarity, altruism and responsibility. The latter of these virtues will help them to be honest administrators and politicians.

Water management should be based on a participatory approach, involving users, planners and policy makers at all levels. Both women and men should be involved in managing water resources and sharing the benefits that come from sustainable water use. In achieving the *2030 Agenda*, the water concerns of the poor become the concerns of all from the perspective of solidarity. This solidarity is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good, to the good of all and of each individual.⁵ It presupposes the effort for a more just social order and requires a preferential attention to the situation of the poor.⁶ The same duty of solidarity that rests on individuals exists also for nations: advanced nations have a very heavy obligation to help the developing people.⁷

³ Pope Francis, Address to the United Nations Organization, New York, 25 September 2015.

⁴ Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, #485,

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.htm

⁵ Cf. Note of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace for the 3rd World Water Forum in Kyoto, Japan, entitled “Water, An Essential Element for Life.”

⁶ Cf. Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, §38-40 and Second Vatican Ecumenical Council *Gaudium et spes*, §100.

⁷ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Gaudium et spes*, §86.