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**Statement by H.E. Archbishop Francis Chullikatt
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Permanent Observer of the Holy See**

65th Session of the UN General Assembly

**High-level meeting on the comprehensive review of the progress achieved in
realizing the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS and the
Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS**

New York, 10 June 2011

Mr. President,

As we gather here today in this high-level meeting of dignitaries from around the world, we do so with the recognition that we stand as one family with those living with HIV and AIDS and remember in our thoughts and prayers those whom this disease has taken from this world. Policies, programmes and political statements are without meaning if we do not recognize the human dimension of this disease in the men, women and children who are living with and affected by HIV and AIDS. Of course, any policy, programme or political statement of this noble organization has little meaning if it is not implemented by the virtuous actions that will help all of those in need.

Over thirty years into the HIV and AIDS disease, the international community continues to search for answers and solutions to halt the spread of HIV and to provide treatment, care and support to the over 33 million people living with HIV and AIDS. From the beginning, Catholic organizations, religious congregations and lay associations have been at the forefront in providing prevention, treatment, care and support to millions around the world while, at the same time, promoting the need for a value-based response to this disease. Through its approximately 117,000 health care facilities around the world, the Catholic Church alone provides over 25% of all care for those living with HIV and AIDS, especially children. These institutions affiliated with the Church are at the forefront for providing a response which sees people not as statistics but rather in their dignity and worth as brothers, sisters and neighbors of the same human family.

My delegation remains committed to achieving the goal of halting and reversing the spread of HIV by promoting the only universally effective, safe and affordable means of halting the spread of the disease: abstinence before marriage and mutual fidelity within marriage, avoiding risk taking and irresponsible behaviors and promoting universal access to drugs which prevent the spread of HIV from mother-to-child. In fact, there is a growing international recognition that the abstinence and fidelity based programs in parts of Africa have been successful in reducing HIV infection, where transmission has largely occurred within the general population. However, despite this acknowledgement, some continue to deny these results and instead are largely guided by ideology and the financial self interest which has grown as a result of the HIV disease.

Combating the spread of HIV does not require expensive drugs and commodities, which seek to diminish the consequences of dangerous and irresponsible behavior, but rather requires a value-based response which recognizes the need to promote the inherent dignity of the human person, thus, responsible sexual behavior and recognition of responsibility to oneself and one's own community. Preventing the spread of HIV requires not only identifying those persons who are at risk of becoming infected, but also identifying the ways and means to help people in avoiding the very activity which puts them at risk of becoming infected. The best cure is prevention that awakens the consciousness of individuals who may be lured into dangerous practices that threaten them and those with whom they may live or otherwise encounter.

Mr. President,

New studies have demonstrated that access to anti-retroviral drugs provides not only a means for treating the disease but also a means for reducing the risks of spreading it. However, access to anti-retroviral therapy continues to be out of reach for many of the poorest and most vulnerable. In low and middle income countries approximately 15 million people are living with HIV but only 5.2 million have access to the life-saving treatment they need. In addition, these same populations continue to lack access to diagnostic technologies and testing equipment which allows for more effective and safe means of treating those living with HIV and AIDS.

With estimates showing that funding to combat HIV and AIDS fell in 2010--for the first time in the history of combating the disease--we are reminded that political declarations and good will need to be matched by concrete actions on the ground and at the international level. The first step in taking such action is to ensure that the 10 million people lacking access to life saving drugs are provided the safe and affordable treatment, care and support required. The approximately \$7 billion U.S. dollars which would be needed to provide this treatment is a substantial sum but pales in comparison to the money and resources spent by countries in the pursuit of war and other destructive activities such as the global enterprise that surrounds arms and drug trading. In addition to closing the funding gap, countries and the private sector must continue to reassess pharmaceutical intellectual property rights to ensure that these protections serve as a means for greater research and advancement, rather than becoming yet another barrier to accessing necessary drugs and medical equipment.

While greater funding and access to necessary drugs is a requirement for addressing the lack of access to treatment, care and support, so too must greater considerations be given to ensuring that these resources are used in a manner which is effective and responsible. Therefore, it should be ensured that access to funding is not restricted to ideologically preconceived notions but rather is based on the ability of organizations to provide safe, affordable and effective care to those who are in need.

Support for those living with HIV and AIDS does not end at providing access to drugs but requires supporting the families affected. The approximately 16 million children worldwide who have been orphaned by AIDS require compassionate care and a structured environment so that they can receive the proper psycho-social support and become active members of the community. Similarly, families which are providing support for family members who are living with HIV and AIDS must be given the necessary economic, social, medical and spiritual support. This also requires adopting policies which eliminate discrimination against those living with HIV and members of their family.

Mr. President,

HIV and AIDS has been and remains one of the major tragedies of our time. It is not only a health problem of enormous magnitude, but it is also a social, economic and political concern. It is also a moral question, as the causes of the disease clearly reflect a serious crisis of values. Prevention first and foremost must be directed toward formation and education in responsible human behavior or, in other words, acquired human dignity. This is the key to avoiding the infection. The starting point must be the recognition that the human person can and should change irresponsible and dangerous behavior, rather than simply accept such behaviour as if it were inevitable and unchangeable. Moreover, in the field of formation and education, especially as regards children, their parents have the primary right, responsibility and duty and their contributions are extremely helpful and efficacious.

The fight to eliminate the spread of HIV and the work to provide universal access to treatment, care and support also requires broader social and personal development. In areas which lack access to clean drinking water, sanitation facilities, sufficient nutrition, adequate housing and basic health care, the ability of individuals and organizations to provide treatment to those living with HIV and AIDS and ward off opportunistic infections will continue to be elusive. Likewise, personal development requires that individuals are provided the education, counseling, and spiritual support necessary to make responsible decisions and to achieve their full potential.

The Holy See and the various organizations of the Catholic Church remain committed to living and working in solidarity with those living with HIV and AIDS and will continue to advocate steadfastly for the demands of the common good and providing support and care to those most in need.

Thank you, Mr. President.