



## Introduction to Inaugural Seminar

Friday 23 March

In the name of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and on behalf of the World Youth Alliance: a warm welcome and thank you for joining in this inaugural seminar on women's health, maternal health and HIV/AIDS.

The seminar has two primary aims. First, to examine the public health data and evidence as it relates to issues of global health. Second, to discuss our best strategies in presenting this evidence particularly at international fora and through international negotiations.

At creation, each child of God freely receives a soul of inestimable value, because each one of us is made in the image of God and saved by His love made incarnate in Christ. Each one, from the first moment of conception, through natural death, regardless of capacities and abilities, is of such unutterable value that the Son of God suffered and died for us. Therefore the Church is called to safeguard the dignity of each and every human being, and she takes up this defense with joy.

This infinite value, while clarified and enhanced for us through the eyes of faith, is also known to us through the eyes of reason. Reason and experience demonstrate human uniqueness within creation. Man is different from other animals and things because of his moral nature; his capacity to know, and choose, the good, and concomitantly evil, too.

We have also, as a result of the grave injustices and tragedies that have befallen man at the hands of man himself, learned what man is not, namely, not an object to be used or discarded by the State. Rather, man is the subject of his own life and the author of his own moral drama. This reality must be fiercely defended and supported, “in season and out of season,” always and everywhere.

Such doctrine of man in the *res socialis* is at the heart of the work of Justice and Peace. Our Dicastery is tasked with analyzing the grave, ongoing attacks against the human person within social reality, and to formulate authentic responses for the Church to give to the world.

Therefore we are grateful for this day of work with you on these important themes. Far too often, they become means of manipulating and attacking human dignity, through powerful international institutions, allocations of foreign aid, and the advocacy of some international NGO's.

Our task today is to bear witness first to human dignity and, from there, to the relationship between faith and reason. Faith and reason, as most recently Pope Benedict has taught, are never in opposition. Faith is not the blind acceptance of precepts contrary to reason, and reason flourishes when rooted in the illumination of faith, which can indicate the correct path, or first principles, necessary for further fruitful explorations of our reason and rational nature. “Reason always stands in need of being purified by faith... For its part, religion always needs to be purified by reason in order to show its authentically human face” (*Caritas in veritate* 56)

The morning session will examine the reality that current practices in public health research and evidence align exactly with the Church's teaching on women's health, maternal health, and HIV/AIDS. Understanding this evidence and data can help the Church to make a stronger proposal to the world, and can also recognize the tremendous work that men and women of deep commitment to the future of humanity have made and continue to make. Understanding

and knowing this information is of critical importance to an authentic dialogue between the Church and the World.

Even where it seems impossible to proclaim the Gospel or irrelevant to even try, the Church looks with great joy to the heroism and courage of witnesses to hope which continue to arise, and which present the Gospel message through the living witness of her individual members in its most compelling form to the world. The afternoon session will examine trends and activities at the United Nations and around the world, in which themes and certain language can provide grave and immediate threats to the human person, and which are often refuted only at great personal cost, and a willingness to witness to the ultimate meaning of man as what is at stake in these controversies.

Our speakers today are such witnesses. They are men and women who give this witness to the world and those around them through their medical and research expertise, and, this afternoon, through the diplomatic and legal expertise. Having heard the Gospel, they proclaim it through their lips and with their competence. In your name, I thank them for all they will give us.

We look forward to your participation throughout this workshop, and now thanking Dr Anna Halpine, founder and director of World Youth Alliance, and everyone who is contributing, I turn proceedings over to her with my prayer for God's blessing on this day.

Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson  
President