



# The Holy See

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*Message of His Holiness Paul VI  
to Dr. Marcolino G. Candau,  
Director-General of the World Health Organization,  
on its 25th anniversary\**

On several occasions, particularly in February 1966 on the occasion of your visit to us in the Vatican, and in 1978 on the twentieth Anniversary of the World Health Organization, we have expressed to you the esteem and interest with which we follow the activities of that body. On this twenty-fifth anniversary of the coming into effect of its Constitution, we are anxious to join in the tribute and good wishes which are reaching it from all sectors of the International Community.

An essential function devolves upon the World Health Organization in the concerted effort of the family of the United Nations and Specialized Agencies with a view to the complete development of mankind – "of the whole man and of all men" – to repeat the formula that ran through our Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* on the development of peoples. The first article of your Constitution assigns you the purpose "of bringing all peoples to the highest level of health possible"; and assuring for every human being the exercise of this fundamental right, "the possession of the best state of health he is capable of reaching", as the preamble of this same Constitution says.

To watch over man's health, improve it, prevent disorders, cure them, should they arise, is that not dedication to the service of the Creator's first gift to man: life? This life, the source of joy when it gushes forth, the beginning of a destiny that is unique each time and, in spite of appearances, always admirable, since it is called to bloom in endless happiness! That is why the professions which dedicate themselves to the health of men carry out a lofty and redoubtable task and are among the noblest vocations in the service of man.

It is true that the specific work of the World Health Organization concerns public health: you tackle the problems of human life, its promotion and protection, in the fields of health administration, training and research, epidemiology and improvement in sanitation, large-scale prophylactic

measures. But you are well aware that you are always in the service of individuals whose lives, or in any case the "quality" of their lives, as is said today, often depends on your steps, your activities and your decisions. The value and the respect for individual life in the eyes of the World Health Organization can rightly be illustrated by the place it gives in its programmes to the outcasts of society such as the mentally impaired, the handicapped, the victims of drug addiction, and so many others.

In the preface of the book published by the Organization at the end of its second decade of existence, you spoke, Mr. Director-General, of the "sense of the irreplaceable value of every human life". It is this sense which, after twenty-five years of life, must win for an Organization such as the one you direct, the gratitude of many, the esteem of all. At a moment when the outbreak of violence on so many points of the globe, on the one hand, and on the other hand the giddy whirl in which modern society is so often caught up and which dims true values, seem to undervalue life, all life, from its origin on to its decline, it is our most fervent wish on this twenty-fifth Anniversary, that the World Health Organization to which the International Community has entrusted the preservation and promotion of men's health, should maintain on all occasions the primacy of life and keep for mankind the complete contribution of an authentic deontology in regard to it.

We are aware, Mr. Director-General, that in the course of this Assembly, you are preparing to hand over to some one else a general management which has identified you with the Organization for twenty years. So we would like, in conclusion, to express to you and to the one who will be called upon to succeed you our most fervent wishes, accompanied by our prayer to the Lord, on behalf of the entire Organization and yourselves, that He may bless the work begun twenty-five years ago.

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\*ORa n.21 p.12.

*Paths to Peace* p.454-455.