



**Caring for persons, peoples and the planet**  
***WG4 Webinar with Diplomatic Corps***  
**19 February 2021**

On February 19<sup>th</sup> 2021, the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development (DPIHD) welcomed the coordinators of the Vatican COVID-19 Commission and His Excellency Archbishop Paul R. Gallagher on the occasion of a virtual seminar hosted for diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See. This webinar, organized by WG4 of the Commission under theme *Caring for persons, peoples and the planet in times of pandemic*, advanced the Commission's call to promote socio-political and ecological love at national and international level alongside an integral, collaborative effort to guarantee universal access to COVID-19 vaccines. More than 40 embassies participated in the session which produced a rich reflection and dialogue about the meaning of *care* in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and explored possible actions to nurture fraternity and unity in the post-pandemic world.

The webinar was opened by His Eminence Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson, Prefect of the DPIHD, who briefly presented the work of the Commission and reiterated the moral responsibility of nations to collaborate towards an equitable access to effective vaccines and treatments against the COVID-19 virus. He explained that, in light of the global vulnerabilities exposed by the pandemic, and the global consequences it has unravelled, a global effort is required to remedy it. He denounced current displays of vaccine nationalism that are inhibiting care and fraternity among peoples - the consequences of which are largely suffered by the poor - and exhorted nations to recognize the moral and social responsibility they have to their neighbours. In order to reimagine and prepare the future according to the vision of the Holy Father, as articulated in the encyclicals *Laudato Si'* and *Fratelli Tutti*, all interventions to mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic, especially those relating to vaccines, must be framed in light of ethical implications, and carried out in a way that leaves *no one behind*.

Following these opening remarks, panellists Fr. Carlo Casalone (moral theologian and member of the Pontifical Academy for Life) and Sister Carol Keehan (former CEO of the US Catholic Health Association and current coordinator of the Public Health task force of WG2 of the Commission) offered speeches on the issues of universal access to COVID-19 vaccines and health care in the post-COVID-19 world. To begin with, echoing Cardinal Turkson's presentation, Fr. Casalone expanded on the ethical implications of vaccines through an analysis of their "life-cycles". By referencing the Commission's note *Vaccine for all. 20 points for a fairer and healthier world*, which he co-authored and which was sent to attendees in preparation for the webinar, Fr. Casalone spoke of achieving ethical COVID-19 vaccines and vaccination by allowing the principles of universal destination of goods, justice, solidarity and inclusiveness to guide each stage of development; from research and development to distribution and application. Sr. Carol Keehan thereafter offered insights about the promotion of an integral and inclusive approach to universal access to health care services in the post-COVID-19 future. She began by exploring the notion of



vulnerability, emphasizing that some nations have been more resilient than others in navigating the current crisis, and highlighting the need for global cooperation based on a new universal solidarity to ensure equitable access to vaccines. She identified vaccine resistance as a prevalent obstacle to this new universal solidarity and shared an initiative of the Public Health task force to mitigate it. Namely, a vaccine “toolkit” is currently being elaborated for local churches and communities around the world, containing clinical answers to prevalent doubts surrounding existing COVID-19 vaccines, ethical guidelines about vaccination, Pope Francis’ and the Church’s teachings about vaccines, and a family guide, emphasizing the importance of vaccination and healthy behaviour.

The panel discussion was followed by a Q&A session during which attendees were invited to share their reflections, initiatives, priorities, and proposals to foster unity and resilience in the post-COVID-19 world. They engaged in substantial exchanges with panellists about the main obstacles to universal vaccination faced by their respective governments and ongoing national vaccine roll-out plans. On one hand, geopolitical tensions, economic crisis and insufficient technical capacities emerged as the most pressing challenges to universal vaccination in several developing countries. Conversely, important initiatives were shared by several ambassadors, including pledges made by the US and UK governments to the UN COVAX mechanism (a contribution of \$4 billion and a promise of donating the majority vaccine surpluses respectively) to support vaccine distribution in approximately 92 developing countries. Overall, supporting existing multilateral efforts like COVAX was hailed as the necessary path forward, as was the reinforcement and renewal of the World Health Organization (WHO).

Archbishop Paul Gallagher closed the webinar with a reaffirmation of *care* as the overarching framework for actions and policies in the post-COVID-19 recovery. He called on participants to combat “vaccine fatigue” and counter the spirit of helplessness, resignation, and indifference surrounding global vaccination, with the spirit of hope, collaboration and care. His Excellency welcomed the initiatives shared by participants, and hailed existing global efforts to achieve universal and equitable access to vaccines. He considered that the measure of success of the present webinar would be the extent to which it contributed to maintaining the momentum of these efforts. In closing, Archbishop Gallagher echoed Pope Francis’ call for a renewal, reinforcement and reform of the current multilateral system so as to emerge from the current crisis as a united human family.