



**“Explanation of Position of the Holy See on the
Conclusion of the Executive Committee on *International
Protection and Durable Solutions in the Context of a Public
Health Emergency*”**

**Delivered during the Adoption of the Final Report
of the 72nd Session of the Executive Committee of the UNHCR
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Geneva**

The Holy See acknowledges that the adoption of the Conclusion of the Executive Committee on International Protection and Durable Solutions in the Context of a Public Health Emergency should be a sign of the political will of Member States to offer concrete aid and protection to refugees, asylum seekers and other people of concern to the UNHCR.

Your Excellency,

It is regrettable that the pandemic has become a crisis of protection as well as another cause, and sometimes an excuse, to delay the achievement of durable solutions. In some cases, Member States have even used this crisis to burden host-communities through an unsustainable strategy of externalization, avoiding direct responsibility for large, mixed flows of migrants and refugees through agreements that stop them, often indefinitely, at strategic points along their journey.

The Holy See wishes to express its deep concern that, in this regard the pandemic has also challenged fundamental norms of refugee law by Member States to the right to seek asylum and the cardinal principle of *non-refoulement*. Sadly, amidst the tragedy of forced displacement, in certain regions, solidarity is clearly in short supply.

In this regard, the Holy See reiterates the need to protect the right to health of everyone, including refugees and migrants, and especially of women and children who are at particular risk in humanitarian situations. It is striking that while certain Member States on this Committee disagree about ensuring this right and specifically to guaranteeing access to quality and sometimes even basic health care for refugees, those same States go out of their way to promote access to abortion, under the guise of a “health-care service”.

Healthcare must be ensured through non-discriminatory, comprehensive laws and policies that are centered on the good of every human person, and founded on the right to life for all, from conception to natural death. Moreover, we reaffirm that any definition of healthcare that seeks to include abortion does not share international consensus, violates human dignity and ignores the religious beliefs of many.

Your Excellency,

Along these lines, the Holy See, in conformity with its nature and particular mission, and keeping in mind the extensive work of the Catholic Church and its institutions alongside UNHCR in assisting refugees and migrants, wishes to make the following reservations related to concepts reflected in the “Conclusion of the Executive Committee on International Protection and Durable Solutions in the Context of a Public Health Emergency”:

Regarding the terms “sexual and reproductive health” and “sexual and reproductive health-care services” contained in OP 16 and OP 17, the Holy See considers these terms as applying to a holistic concept of health. Therefore, the Holy See does not consider abortion, access to abortion, or access to abortifacients as a dimension of these terms.

Additionally, the Holy See does not consider the inclusion of this language as a precedent for the process of elaborating and negotiating such Conclusions in the future and affirms its right as Member State of the Executive Committee to refuse to join consensus on the use of such terminology in the future.

The Holy See, one of the founding members of the Executive Committee and a tireless advocate for all refugees and migrants, would reiterate that it has decided not to block consensus for the sake of preserving dialogue and affirming those positive elements contained within the conclusions adopted today. For this same reason, we are very concerned that some Delegations refused to show any degree of flexibility in considering the various proposals that were made in good faith and in a timely manner both by our Delegation and by the Rapporteur.

The fact that certain Member States of this Committee would use this “take it or leave it approach” to language that does not share international consensus ultimately hinders multilateralism and undermines the legitimacy of this important Organization, the unity of its Membership and its significant work for the sake of refugees everywhere.

I thank you.