



## **EUROPE/ITALY - Day of the Child: 200 million children under 5 in danger of death from malnutrition**

Rome (Agenzia Fides) – November 20, 2009 marks the International Day of the Rights of the Child and Adolescent declared by the United Nations to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (20 November 1989). Ratifying the Convention, States undertake the commitment to respect and protect children as persons who are entitled to a dignified existence. Unfortunately, the path to ensuring this right is still long. In developing countries, 200 million children under 5 years are dying due of malnutrition, according to UNICEF, while the recently ended World Summit on Food Security of FAO warns that hunger in the world is at record levels, affecting more than 1 billion people, and food prices in poor countries remain stubbornly high despite the fact that 2009 showed a good world cereal production.

The general picture shows a dramatic situation: in developing countries, one in four children are malnourished; more than 72 million do not attend school; and each year, worldwide, 9 million children under 5 years of age die from preventable or curable causes, almost 2 million of them on the day of their birth, while every day over 4 thousand children under 5 die from a lack of drinking water. Worldwide, there are more than 15 million orphans from AIDS. The majority of malaria deaths are in sub-Saharan children under five years of age. 2 million children are involved in child prostitution rings and over 215 million spend their childhood working.

Recently, the President of the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers, Archbishop Zygmunt Zimowski, in speaking at a panel discussion on the current situation of the health of children in the world, presented some statistical data including emerging diseases and disabilities, violence and abuse sexual, child labor, environmental pollution, early marriages, child prostitution, female genital mutilation, etc.

This shows that 28% of the world's population are children under the age of 15 years, but unequally shared by continent (Europe: 18%, Africa: 43%). 20% of the 130 million births have died at birth, with a difference by continent and region within the same continent: America: 7% Africa: 29%; Southeast Asia: 31%. Furthermore, 16% of infants have low birth weight (