



## Caritas Internationalis

### Presentation of the President's Report to the General Assembly

By +Oscar Andrés Cardinal Rodríguez Maradiaga SDB

Being part of this wonderful gathering of the Caritas Family today, I can't help but wonder what the founders of our confederation would be thinking if they were with us.

At the inaugural meeting in December 1951, just 13 organisations were represented. Today we have 165 member organisations. Could our founders have imagined how we would grow to become one of the largest humanitarian and development operations in the world?

Although Caritas has certainly grown and changed dramatically, the original vision and inspiration of our founders remain as pertinent as they were 60 years ago.

They saw Caritas at the heart of the Church's mission – as an *opus proprium* of the Church, a sign and sacrament of “the unity of the entire human race” (*Lumen Gentium* 1).

They were supported and inspired at that time by the then deputy Secretary of State, Msgr Giovanni Battista Montini – now better known to us as Pope Paul VI.

At the start of my mandate as President, we marked the 40th anniversary of his great encyclical *Populorum Progressio*.

“Development is the new name for peace,” wrote Paul VI. “The hungry nations of the world cry out to the peoples blessed with abundance. And the Church, cut to the quick by this cry, asks each and every man to hear his brother's plea and answer it lovingly.”

The preferential option for the poor, expounded by Paul VI, remains one of the core principles of Caritas Internationalis.

Our founders wanted Caritas to respond to humanity in need, anywhere in the world. They wanted us to advocate for the transformation of the world according to Catholic social teaching.

And I am sure they also foresaw the need for Caritas to respond to the signs of the times and adapt itself accordingly.

As Pope Benedict says in his encyclical *Spe Salvi*: “Every generation has the task of engaging anew in the arduous search for the right way to order human affairs; this task is never simply completed,” (25).



In the same way, Caritas has needed to find new ways to fulfil its potential as a global force for social transformation.

The last General Assembly set in motion a vital programme of renewal for Caritas Internationalis. The key focus areas included humanitarian response, the promotion of integral human development, peace-building, and the adaptation of our governance and management systems to better reflect the role of the confederation in the world today.

These changes were required not just because we have grown in size. Changing global contexts, and the emergence of new constraints and contradictions within Caritas Internationalis itself, necessitated qualitative change.

Amendments to our Statutes were clearly necessary due to the public canonical legal status granted to Caritas Internationalis by Pope John Paul II and during the past four years, we have met this challenge with energy, a huge commitment of time and determination.

Together with the Secretary General and Bureau, I set up a small group, to review the structure, functions, roles and responsibilities of our governance bodies. Every Caritas member organisation was invited to participate in this process.

After many hours of work by the Executive Committee and the Working Party on Governance Review, and consultations with the Legal Affairs Commission and our 165 members, new draft statutes were presented to the Secretary of State in May 2010. This was a happy and proud moment.

Another personal priority for me as Caritas President during the past four years has been to lead the strengthening of our identity as Caritas and as Church. As we confront new and complex challenges, it is important that we are clear about our own identity.

We have sought to strengthen our hearts, to develop what our Holy Father Benedict XVI in *Deus Caritas Est* (31b) calls a “heart which sees”.

Caritas is not simply a non-governmental organisation – it is much more. Our experience and our formation of the heart, through the encounter with Christ in the stranger and the marginalised, transforms Caritas in its daily work into an authentic witness of God’s love present in our world.

We know that the Caritas confederation is a treasure of theological reflection and action, on all levels. In order to promote understanding of our Catholic identity, in 2008 the Executive Committee established a theology working group, which has supported the production of two publications.



A booklet entitled “Caritas – A sign of God’s Love for All Humanity” was produced for Caritas workers, volunteers, and beneficiaries and has proved popular with Caritas staff around the world. In it, we tried to capture the experiences of Caritas workers in order to understand the essential connection between our work and our faith.

We also considered our role in trying to establish a more just world. Justice and human promotion are an indispensable part of the mission of the Church, which is the advocate of the poor.

In a second publication, I wanted to share with Caritas workers, and the entire Church, some examples of theological reflection, inspired and led by the need to serve the spiritual thirst and hunger of those serving the poor.

The anthology, “Caritas: Love Received and Given”, aims simply to add, in the context of the 60th anniversary of Caritas Internationalis, what I hope will be some helpful articles about the *raison d’être* for our work.

My thanks to the members of the theology working group for supporting me in bringing together this collection of essays, inspired by the words of Pope Benedict XVI in his third social encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, and also by what I have witnessed of the work of Caritas Internationalis.

I have seen Caritas at work in many parts of the world, but I shall remember especially how our member organisations came together to respond to the devastating earthquake in Haiti in January 2010. When I visited Haiti not long after the disaster, I encountered a waking nightmare of destruction, lost lives, maimed children, and of tens of thousands of people huddled in makeshift camps.

I was struck by how years of neglect, corruption, and under-development had left the country unable to respond adequately in its hour of need. In that sense, it was as much a man-made disaster as it was a natural disaster.

The disproportionate impact that natural disasters have on poor people was also evident after the earthquake in Peru in 2007, which left thousands of people homeless. Again, the Caritas confederation supported our local Caritas member. I was able to see for myself the work of Caritas Peru in providing food, shelter, medicine and care. I was delighted to accept on behalf of Caritas Internationalis an award by the Peruvian government in recognition of this work.

In many parts of the world, our Caritas workers operate in highly dangerous situations, often in the midst of violent conflicts.

A Caritas clinic was destroyed by warplanes in Gaza; Caritas workers and partners were murdered in Congo, Colombia and Haiti. Bombs in Pakistan



and Nepal killed and maimed staff and the people we seek to help. And we lost staff and volunteers in Iraq to violence.

During the conflict in Sri Lanka, Caritas workers stayed with the people, even under heavy bombardment. "How could we leave them?", they said. "We are their light, showing that a better reality is possible." One of our workers there was killed and another was seriously injured.

Where is the face of God in such tragedies? We see God's love in the human response to these crises. We find courage in the actions of the survivors themselves. In the first hours following a disaster, they are the ones who save lives, bring communities together, and offer comfort to those around them.

Jesus said: "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days" (*Jn 2:19.*) Out of the ruins, we believe communities can build better futures for themselves.

Less than two years into my four-year mandate as President, the world was hit by a man-made disaster of a different kind – the global financial crisis. This crisis will have an impact for years to come, particularly on the world's poorest people. The people who have benefited least from decades of unequal economic growth will pay the greater price for this folly.

The cost of rescuing the banks responsible for the crisis has used up valuable resources that could have been spent on poverty alleviation.

With less than five years left to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, rich countries are still not providing the level of funding they promised.

When I represented Caritas Internationalis at a UN development summit in New York in September 2008, I said that the world suffers from a poverty of the imagination. We need to imagine not a "First World" or a "Third World", but "One World" in which we all have a shared duty to the poor, wherever they are.

I saw the possibility for such a world in the young people I met in Australia for World Youth Day in 2008. They wanted to create a blueprint for a better world and for them, the possibilities seemed limitless.

We must not forget that poverty is not just found in developing countries. This point was well illustrated at the European Congress on Poverty and Social Exclusion in Madrid organised by Caritas Europa in 2010. At that event, we outlined the actions that governments need to take to reduce poverty in Europe. I took that message to the European Commission in Brussels later in the year.

The issue of poverty was also in our minds when I joined 200,000 people at the Sanctuary of Fatima, Portugal in May 2009 for a candlelight procession, a



Mass and an all-night prayer vigil. With the example and help of the Virgin Mary, Christian communities continue the mission of bringing people to an encounter with Christ, and because of this, we invoke her again as the Star of the new evangelisation.

For six decades, Caritas Internationalis has exercised a preferential option for the poor, responding with love and action to human suffering in an unjust and unequal world. During that time, we have seen great progress in international development and poverty eradication, as well as in our ability to respond to emergencies.

In the second decade of the 21st century, however, we face a series of challenges that threaten to halt or even reverse that progress. Hunger is increasing, the number of humanitarian emergencies is growing, and climate change will cause further harm.

Caritas has a vision for our world as one human family, where no one dies because of poverty. Over the coming years we will strive to fulfil that vision, working under the theme of One Human Family, Zero Poverty.

Throughout its 60 years of service, Caritas has been well aware that its ministry has been much more than the sum total of its efforts. It has been a gift. At this General Assembly, we come together to celebrate this precious gift and thank God for the love He has made grow throughout the 165 organisations around the world that make up the Caritas confederation. We remember again *Populorum Progressio*: “We must travel this road together, united in minds and hearts.”

Since I became your President in 2007 I have had the huge pleasure of visiting many Caritas members, including Australia, Austria, Germany, Luxembourg, Belgium, Canada, Ethiopia, South Africa, Haiti, Mexico, Peru, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and the USA. My thanks to all the Caritas organisations who have welcomed me over the last four years.

I would also like to give my special thanks to the offices of the Holy See, who have helped us in our work, especially the Secretariat of State and the Pontifical Councils for Justice and Peace, Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, Health Pastoral Care, and Cor Unum. We offer our full support to His Eminence, Cardinal Robert Sarah, President of Cor Unum as he begins his work and thank his staff who accompany us at our Executive Committee and Bureau meetings.

And of course on behalf of all Caritas members, I would like to express our appreciation to all the General Secretariat Staff and the Regional Coordinators and especially to the outgoing Secretary General Lesley-Anne Knight for her devoted service in making our collective vision a reality.

# Caritas Internationalis General Assembly

22nd to 27th May 2011, Domus Mariae Palazzo Carpegna, Rome



Caritas Internationalis is immensely privileged to be at the heart of the life-giving cycle of love. Looking at Caritas today, who cannot be filled with pride at our achievements, and be humbled by the love we have received from the faithful and from the people we seek to support.

I thank you and may God bless you all....