



Caritas Internationalis
General Secretariat
Palazzo San Calisto
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European Development Days

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Opening Ceremony address by Lesley-Anne Knight

Secretary General, Caritas Internationalis

**European Union Ambassador of the European Year for
Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion**

Your Royal Highness, President Buzek, Prime Minister Leterme,
Prime Minister Madhav Jumar Nepal, Mr Strauss-Kahn, President
Barroso Ladies and Gentlemen...

I am delighted to be with you today as an Ambassador for the
European Year 2010 for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion.

As the year draws to a close, this is a good time to reflect on some of
the achievements of the European Year 2010 and, in the context of

these Development Days, to consider its implications for the continuing fight against poverty in our world.

In my 'day job' as Secretary General of Caritas International, poverty in all its forms is an overriding concern. As a global organisation, Caritas makes a “**preferential option for the poor.**” That is, we prioritise the needs of the poorest , marginalized, stigmatized – wherever they may be. And not only in the world's poorest countries, but also in the richest – in the United States where over 40 million people live below the poverty line, in Japan, Australia and in **all 27** countries of the European Union.

The existence of poverty in Europe has been often overlooked and underestimated. It is one of the successes of the European Year 2010 that it has shone new light on this reality. But poverty and social exclusion are a thread running through our common humanity, **inside** and **outside** of Europe.

I have just returned from an international Caritas congress held in Senegal entitled “The Female Face of Migration and Poverty.” Over 50% of all migrants are women and girls. And in Europe, today, where **one in six citizens are living at risk of poverty**, poverty and social exclusion too have a female face. Employment, work and pay are not equally distributed in all EU states. And as in Sri Lanka, Philippines,

Senegal, Chad and Guatemala, here in Europe stereotypes still play a role in affecting women's chances of equal financial resources. And although a job may be the best route out of poverty, eight per cent of employed people don't earn enough to escape it.

Caritas Organisations have been responding to poverty in Europe for many years and welcomed the opportunity to participate in the European Year 2010, through **Caritas' 'Zero Poverty'** campaign, which has included a wide range of activities, conferences, city runs, fairs, festivals, and candle lighting ceremonies. In addition, a petition calling for commitments to poverty eradication on the part of politicians and decision makers has collected more than 20,000 signatures. As a whole, the European Year 2010 has achieved some notable achievements.

In June this year, a major step forward was taken with the adoption of the "**Europe 2020 Strategy**". Now, for the first time, the EU has a tangible target: to lift **at least** 20 million Europeans out of the risk of poverty and social exclusion by 2020. And **every Member State** will be expected to contribute to this common objective with its national targets.

It is clear that these are testing times for many EU Member States – as they are for many other countries around the world – but the

eradication of poverty is not an optional activity that can be abandoned as soon as budgets have to be cut. It is, rather, a moral duty, and the responsibility of every community to ensure that its people can live in dignity and be able to fully participate in and contribute to society.

A success of the European Year 2010 has been to show that combating poverty is a shared responsibility, involving the cooperation and collaboration of many actors. It's about values like compassion and solidarity.

And when we starting to see global issues in terms of 'people' – in terms of individual lives – we are far more likely to begin to feel real compassion for those affected. Compassion of course means “to suffer with” and it therefore goes hand in hand with the core value of solidarity – that sense of responsibility we feel for others by virtue of our interdependence as members of a common humanity.

When we truly feel the suffering of others, we cannot help but question the **reasons** for that suffering. And the roots of poverty are fed by the political and economic choices in both North and South. We only need consider our past neglect of small-scale farming and the impact of EU agricultural subsidies on poor communities world-wide with the crisis of hunger and food insecurity, as just one example.

Ill-advised choices have contributed to the economic, climate, and food crises we face today. We must fundamentally reshape our economies and as successfully demonstrated in this European Year 2010, the most efficient strategies are those involving partnership and cooperation, from the grass-roots to the European level. Governments and public authorities certainly are at the forefront, but the involvement of NGOs, civil society and faith-based organisations, social partners, business and the media is also essential.

While the EU can provide the leadership and coordination for these efforts, it will be up to Member States to ensure the necessary funding for the practical implementation for this strategy.

Finally, I would like to make some connections between the European Year 2010 for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion and these European Development Days...

Compassion for those who live in poverty should not be confined by geographic boundaries. We are calling for a global, democratic and green economy with human and environmental sustainability at its heart.

I believe that the successes of the European Year 2010 will not be confined to Europe. We can build on the awareness, compassion and

solidarity it has developed, and extend it to the parts of our planet where the world's poorest people live.

The programme during these two days will touch on all of these questions. On certain issues, many strands come together – for example the debate around a **Financial Transaction Tax** concerns taxing harmful speculation, food and energy commodities, and financing climate mitigation and adaptation. Caritas and CIDSE organisations, together with other civil society actors, are challenging the EU to move the discussion from feasibility to implementation. And I am pleased to note that key actors in this debate are here on the stage with me!

At the global level, we are fast approaching the deadline for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. During the next five years we need a concerted effort to ensure that we do not fail. And given the consensus on the value of a global development framework, we need to start today to reflect on robust proposals for what we will need beyond 2015, and how we can get there.

I have noticed that one of the sessions planned for tomorrow is entitled “***Do Europeans care about the rest of the world?***”. I don't wish to pre-empt that discussion, but I personally believe the answer is “**Yes, we do.**”

In 2010, Europe has demonstrated its ability and desire to tackle poverty. We must now harness that momentum to ensure that Europe plays a leading role in delivering concrete action to eradicate global poverty and, as part of one human family, create a more just world.