

Caritas Internationalis
Sudan Partnership Forum and Consultation
Monday 22nd June – Palazzo San Calisto, Vatican City

Opening Speech
Secretary General, Lesley-Anne Knight

Your Grace, your Excellencies, Caritas colleagues and friends,

It is an enormous pleasure and privilege for Caritas Internationalis to welcome you to our General Secretariat today for this Partnership Forum and Consultation on Sudan.

We have the honour of the presence of distinguished members of the Sudanese Catholic Bishops Conference. I thank your Grace, Archbishop Paolino Lukudu Loro, (Juba) and your Lordships Bishop Vincent Mojwok, (Chairman of Sudanaid – Caritas Sudan), Bishop Eduardo Kussala, (Tombura Yambio), Bishop Antonio Menegazzo, (El Obeid and representing Darfur) and Bishop Daniel Adwok Marco Kur, (Auxiliary Bishop of Khartoum) for accepting our invitation to this dialogue and consultation.

I welcome most warmly Fr Omina Leo also of the Sudan Catholic Bishops Conference and Nyiker Awin of Sudanaid, together with our friends and colleagues from Aid to the Church in Need, the Religious Network for South Sudan and CIDSE. And it is a particular pleasure to have with us our CI consultant on the Sudan, Mauro Ansaldi, colleagues from Caritas Africa and so many Caritas member organisations with a longstanding commitment and dedication to the people of Sudan.

President Barack Obama and Ban Ki Moon, the UN Secretary General, met in March this year to discuss the impact of the economic crisis on hundreds of millions of poor people in the developing world. The Secretary General summed up the discussions by saying, ***“We look forward to making this make or break year, into a year of solutions”***.

At that particular time (24 March 2009) demonstrations by youth were taking place in the Sudan to condemn the International Criminal Court arrest warrant issued for Al-Bashir, Sudan’s leader. On the humanitarian front, as of 10th of March, 183 international

staff had left the country, and there were increasing concerns about the safety of national and international staff. The government of Sudan confiscated dozens of supplies and equipment in retaliation for Al-Bashir's indictment. Some 16 national and international Non Governmental Organizations were then kicked out of the country due to President Al-Bashir's anger at being called to the International Criminal Court.

Of course John Holmes, the UN Under-Secretary for Humanitarian Affairs made a swift visit to Sudan. When prompted on Al-Bashir's actions, he said, "we cannot expect these problems to be resolved quickly. This is a long-term problem....". And he went on to explain that the UN assessment essentially showed that while efforts were being made to plug some of the gaps, "these are band-aid solutions and not long term solutions...."

"We also need to **rebuild trust and rebuild an operating environment**," the UN Under-Secretary said.

On his next visit on 11th May, John Holmes was once again in conciliatory mood, stressing the need for **unity**, and that "the national unity government, the Government of South Sudan and the UN **shall work together** to put an end to tribal violence." He called on the international community to live up to its commitments to meet the humanitarian needs in Sudan, indicating that assistance shall be extended to all the needy people in Sudan. John Holmes said that he had obtained an affirmation from the Sudan government that it was keen to combat the phenomenon of abduction of humanitarian aid workers.

What does this illustrate for us as the Church, working as communities and organisations in the Sudan? As Caritas, together with sister organisations, we feel firstly that this is a make or break time, but a time for solutions. And we seek to find these in partnership, in dialogue with one another, **rebuilding trust and rebuilding an operating environment**.

Secondly, none of us can operate in isolation. **Unity is important**, because in unity there is strength. It is one of the greatest strengths of our Church that we bring together so many diverse organisations – united by a common faith and a common vision. And unity has never been more important than today when there is an urgent need for us to speak out, clearly and powerfully, on the

world stage, as we face unprecedented problems of global proportions.

Whilst we too, like John Holmes, insist through our advocacy messages that the international community must live up to its commitments to meet the humanitarian needs in Sudan, and we continue to put pressure on governments to honour their responsibilities, one of our key concerns in calling this meeting together was to rediscover and make explicit our role as Church leaders, as Catholic organisations, as communities and members of civil society in the Sudan. We have after all a vital role to play in building and sustaining communities. And as Caritas we believe primarily in people not systems; and real power lies with people and communities.

And thirdly, how do we **re-build trust** and unity amongst ourselves? There is a growing perception that, particularly in the rich countries of the developed world, the ethical dimension of development has been neglected. Financial growth has been inequitable, leading to a widening gap between rich and poor.

As faith-based Catholic organisations, we are well-placed to provide leadership in reasserting the need for just and ethical solutions to global problems. For example, this is the approach we are taking as Caritas with our Climate Justice campaign, and it is something we can pursue in many other of our activities. We can pursue values-based, ethical approaches and a respect and promotion of the common good in coordinating our humanitarian responses, in our dealings with local, national and international institutions and in agreeing how we work together, ever mindful of our preferential option for the poor and suffering amongst us, irrespective of race, creed and religion.

One of the outcomes of the economic crisis affecting most of the world is that the international community is making enormous efforts to move towards greater cooperation and participation. It is important that we in the Church reflect on these developments.

We cannot afford to have divisions, rivalries, G8s – or even G20s – within our networks! We all need to consider the broader implications of our activities and look for opportunities to collaborate at a national, regional and global level.

Because the increasing focus on global solutions has implications not only for how nation states cooperate, but also for how our organisations work together.

Within Caritas Internationalis, for example, we have been moving towards building more thematic responses, which unite us across the Regions and enable us to find common ground. This Sudan partnership and consultation forum is another way to maximise our potential, bringing our skills and talents together, strengthening our unity. And I firmly believe this will be more appropriate and effective in meeting the challenges we face in an ever more globalised and interconnected world.

In our humanitarian work we are increasingly having to respond to 'man-made' emergencies and Sudan is one of our highest priorities. As we have seen, the increasing number of climate-related disasters could be said to be 'man-made' if they are related to climate change.

But a second type of 'man-made' disaster involves the suffering and the displacement of peoples caused by conflict and oppressive governments. Our response in these situations presents some complex challenges, with the need to balance the humanitarian imperative to provide swift and effective relief for those who are suffering, with the need to speak out against violence and oppression.

Just last week I was in Beijing with the Caritas Internationalis Korea Working Group, which faces a particularly difficult and complex situation. The fact that Caritas is able to deliver humanitarian aid even in these most difficult of circumstances is a credit to our international coordination and also lends considerable weight to our statements in support of peaceful solutions to problems such as the threat posed by Korea's nuclear weapons programme.

The strengthening of our competence and capacity as Catholic organisations to deliver a professional and effective disaster relief response is an overarching priority. As we have seen, many of the challenges we face today are a result of systemic failures. The financial turmoil in our world is a failure of our economic systems; climate change is a result of our flawed energy and ecological systems; conflict and oppression often result from poor

governance systems. But above all, we are suffering a failure in our value systems – values such as transparency, integrity, compassion, solidarity, partnership, the common good, and justice.

By the end of 2008, **4.9 million** people in Sudan were still displaced by the numerous conflicts which have afflicted the country for over two decades; together they made up the single largest internally displaced population in the world. And as in other countries of the region, two particularly insidious and widespread protection problems facing the internally displaced are rape and sexual violence against girls and women, and forced recruitment of children into armed forces and groups. I am concerned that Sudan has yet to ratify the Pact on Security, Stability and Development in Africa's Great Lakes region (Great Lakes Pact).¹

The world is experiencing a crisis of exclusion, of injustice and inequality. Sixty percent of the world's population still exists on only six per cent of the world's income, while entire communities are exploited and neglected.

In a world so deeply divided between rich and poor, North and South, religious and secular, us and them, we need more than ever, common values and a global ethic that unite us as a human community.

We increasingly need leaders who are able to incorporate values, respect for human dignity, human rights, and the environment, into their decision-making. And all of us need the ability to hold governments accountable for their performance. That will not only be good for government and good for business, but it will also be a powerful force in realising the common good for all.

As Caritas people we are people of faith, people of religion. And the root of the word religion means "to rebind" – to bridge the separation between peoples, to reintegrate the marginalised, to re-establish men and women at the service of our societies, healing our communities. We participate in creating the future by deepening our collective understanding of what wants to emerge in our world.

¹ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre: Global overview of Trends and Developments in 2008

When we see the failure of the key institutions, systems and leadership that should sustain our societies, it is tempting to fall into despair. But this can also be seen as an opportunity for renewal, for a grassroots transformation.

And this means looking deeper at how we can “re-bind” our Church and the organisations working in partnership to promote the development of all the peoples in the Sudan: how we can better contribute towards its effectiveness: how we can find innovative ways of working together in collaboration, for the common good.

There is a saying in English that “*Charity begins at home.*” At a time of financial crisis this can be selfishly used to justify the argument for helping our own people before others. The temptation is towards national introspection and nationalism. But there is another interpretation: And that is that charity begins with self-reflection and internal transformation, the discovery of who we are as individuals and as organisations. And that transformation then leads to an expression of charity and love in the wider world.

May your reflections and the search for effective, coordinated ways of working together for the good of all the peoples of the Sudan be guided by these values.

If we seek to be part of a more effective force in the world, we can begin by reflecting on how we are contributing to this goal, as Church, as organisations and as individuals.

When we reflect on who we are, not just as Christians, but as human beings, as brothers and sisters, we rediscover the source of our being and our strength. And then in the face of all despair, we find joy. And as Caritas people, we can have no better desire than to pour love into the world. We are a sign and a sacrament of the love of God for all humanity, we are a sign and the sacrament of “the unity of the entire human race” (*Lumen Gentium 1*).

Lesley-Anne Knight
Secretary General
Rome, 22nd June 2009