

**Declaration of the Caritas Forum  
on Migration, Policies and Human Rights  
Dakar, 26-28 November 2008**

Representatives of African bishops, the heads of Caritas from Africa and Europe and other collaborating NGOs, gathered at a forum with the theme "Migration, Policies and Human Rights". At the end of this forum, based on their evangelical vision of humankind, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, as well as the principles and values of Caritas, they recall their commitment to integral human development and address their message to everyone.

Every day our organisations welcome migrants. They witness tragedies, people adrift and violations of the rights of migrants. Based on these efforts, they wish to be stakeholders and actors in the dialogues on the theme of migration that they have asked states to engage in.

Our Caritas are mobilised by the principles of dignity and human and people's rights, as well as their vision of migrants, who are the face of Christ and the image of God. At this forum on the theme of migration, they committed themselves to forging alliances amongst African Caritas, between African and European Caritas and with Caritas around the world. They are also committed to stepping up their partnership with other NGOs involved in this field who share their values, as well as with grassroots communities and in synergy with the ecclesial commissions concerned.

Our Caritas condemn accusations of "illegal migration" and therefore refute the criminalisation they give rise to. They wish to emphasise the legitimacy of migration: anything that is in harmony with dignity and human rights is legitimate. Migration is a resource for both migrants and the countries that know how to welcome them. Caritas believes that migration can benefit migrants, host countries and also the countries of origin. Migration should be regulated through dialogue between all the partners involved and by associating with civil society.

The forum proposes the following priority recommendations for Caritas and the governments of host, transit and departure countries.

For Caritas:

- The Caritas network should play an informative and awareness-raising role by disseminating eyewitness accounts and studies on the perils and suffering of migratory routes and the realities of life in transit and destination countries. Prejudices must be broken down and families helped to overcome the obstacles that prevent them from going home, without shame even in cases of failure.
- African Caritas should encourage collaboration amongst themselves and envisage setting up a working group to improve their knowledge, practices, coordination and advocacy actions aimed at Caritas and public authorities at local, national and international level.

- Caritas should organise open spaces in order to encourage reflection, dialogue, collaboration and common strategies.

To governments:

- Countries of origin should give priority to fair and consistent economic policies and good governance.
- All countries should develop a real migration policy. It is their duty to boost the confidence of their young people and give them reasons for hope other than migration.
- Any agreement on migration and/or development should be negotiated between groups of states – for example, between the African Union and the European Union or between the Arab Maghreb Union and the European Union – and not merely operate on a bilateral basis. Any negotiation and follow-up process should involve civil society and be transparent.
- No development policy should be held hostage to migration flow management, and nor should it oblige Africa to police Europe's borders.
- All countries involved in migration should sign and ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.
- Diplomatic authorities should protect their nationals abroad, whatever their bureaucratic or financial situation, and ensure that their rights are not ignored. Agreements that envisage abandoning migrants en route and obliging other countries to welcome them should be opposed.
- International agreements should be aimed at promoting – not reducing – human rights, especially in the area of freedom: restriction of movement, criminalisation, deprivation of liberty.
- Countries should honour their commitments in favour of development, especially funds pledged for aid, and attain the Millennium Development Goals. Funds allocated for aid should not be distorted by expenses that do not concern development, nor by adding migrants' savings, which governments should also protect.

Caritas organisations seek neither to encourage nor prohibit migration, but rather to humanise the phenomenon and focus attention on all its human aspects. For Caritas, the policy to return migrants to their home countries is not guided by any expulsion policy. What is important is the promotion of human dignity.

In this close solidarity with migrants, Caritas organisations are also aware that they are part of the Church. Their commitment to migrants, whether internal or from abroad, is the commitment of the Church itself, the family of God.

Dakar, 28 November 2008