

Final Message

Caritas Internationalis General Assembly

Rome, 23-28 May 2019

“The gospel is our programme of life.” (Pope Francis Homily to the General Assembly May 2019)

Every four years representatives from the Caritas Internationalis confederation of 168 member organisations gather together in solidarity at their General Assembly in Rome.

At this 21st General Assembly, we came to pray and listen, to understand the needs of our people and to celebrate our faith, to discern the signs of the times in the light of the Gospels and decide new paths for our transformative action.

We reaffirmed our commitment to build a world where God is recognised as Love, justice and peace; where solidarity is embraced by all, so there are no more excluded, exploited or abused; where all people live with dignity and where all of creation is cherished in our common home.

We return home joyful for the experience of what the presence of the Risen Lord Jesus has generated among us. We return strengthened in our service of charity, justice and social transformation, accompanied by our bishops.

We come with joy and hope

We rejoiced and found strength in the Canonisation of St. Oscar Romero, St. Teresa of Calcutta and St. Paul VI. They are a source of inspiration and a wonderful testimony to our work and commitment to Caritas.

We continue in our commitment of working together in partnership and fraternal cooperation, so that we can become agents of transformation, helping people to be artisans of their own destiny, defying the structures that make it difficult or impossible for people to prosper, and ensuring that our common home is sustained and respected for future generations.

We prayed for the victims of the Easter bombings in Sri Lanka as well as other victims of violence throughout the world.

We recognised some of the great global achievements of the last four years to which Caritas, in collaboration with Pope Francis, and the whole church and other agencies, have contributed to:

- The Climate Change Summit in Paris (2015) which committed participating countries to reducing CO2 emissions.
- The first UN Humanitarian Summit (2016) in Istanbul which made the principles of

"localisation" a central element of humanitarian assistance.

- The adoption by the United Nations of the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (2018);

God does not reside in the greatness of our accomplishments, but in our encounter with people living in poverty. (Pope Francis Homily to the General Assembly May 2019)

We were inspired and motivated by:

- the words of Pope Francis and by the daily reflections of our president, Cardinal Tagle.
- the outcries and injustices suffered by our people, affected by dehumanising poverty, violence, the destruction of the environment, and the violation of human rights especially of indigenous peoples, migrants, refugees and the victims of human trafficking.
- the testimony of committed women and creative young people
- the prophetic teaching of the "Laudato Si" and by the Year of Mercy
- our ecumenical work and with partners from other faiths (in the light of the Pope's visit to Abu Dhabi), particularly on migration and religious persecution
- the messages from UN leaders on sustainable agriculture and the SDGs

We thanked God for the work of the Caritas family

- We received with admiration the Reports from our President, Cardinal Tagle and from our Secretary General, Michel Roy - stories rich with testimonies of change, hope and merciful compassion. We thanked them for their leadership.
- Our confederation responded with compassion and urgency to the devastation caused by the climate and humanitarian crises, in a growing number of countries worldwide.
- Our campaigns promoted changes in life and relationships, asking countries and people to "Share the journey" with forced migrants, refugees, and harassed people.
- Yet we know that everything we do is only possible through the Grace of God.

We embraced the challenges that reality presents to us, recognising the magnitude of the threat of climate change and ecological crises, in particular in Amazonia (working together with REPAM) and in the Congo basin.

We shared our concern and outrage over the massive forced displacement of people, the growing social and economic inequality, bad governance and corruption, populism and polarisation, political and religious persecution, and the proliferation of conflicts.

We are aware that these crises are unprecedented and require great collaboration - within the confederation, with the whole Church and with other agencies and humanitarian institutions.

Essential is the protection and care of children, adolescents and the most vulnerable people - with zero tolerance of sexual abuse and exploitation. Caritas is committed to ensuring its people work free from intimidation, hostility, humiliation or bullying. We will put into practice the means necessary to confront abuse, along with training and preparation with appropriate

processes.

“We are humble stewards of creation, let us have the humility to listen to life.” (Pope Francis Homily to the General Assembly May 2019)

We leave Rome with an ambitious programme to carry forward at national, regional and global levels, with our local churches, and other humanitarian partners.

We will strive:

- To ensure that Caritas is at the heart of the church, a servant and Samaritan Church, serving for and with love. We will try to accompany people who live in poverty or on the fringes of society, so that they are at the centre of decisions and action.
- To save lives and reduce the impact of humanitarian crises, by deepening the resilience of communities, enhancing preparedness for natural disasters, and responding more effectively.
- To eradicate all forms of poverty and care of the creation by: accompanying the empowerment of communities, promoting integral and sustainable human development, and fighting for the transformation of unjust social or political structures - all guided by the principles within *Laudato Si*.
- To build solidarity at the global level and to intensify the impact of the voices of the poor through coordinated communication, public education and awareness-raising campaigns.
- To build a stronger Caritas, working together more closely, increasing our ability to serve and transform, sharing learning and resources, and supporting our most fragile members.

This General Assembly marks the first time in Caritas' history that a Youth Forum was held. Its message to the Assembly was: “Recognise us as leaders with unique perspectives and talents and give us ownership of our contribution to Caritas' work. Youth are not just the future of Caritas but the present. We can only have greater impact on the communities where Caritas is present if we are an inclusive intergenerational family where Youth have a word in our common home.”

Finally, we wanted to recognise that in our Caritas organisations, we had not done enough to ensure equal opportunities for women to assume leadership positions in management and direction. For this reason, the Caritas confederation will adopt and implement policies and practices that are friendly to families and which promote women in leadership and governance positions, including training, mentoring and preparation.

We leave Rome knowing that God sends us forth accompanied by abundant grace and love to help us deliver on the promise of our collective mandate: to work for One Human Family, One Common Home.

“It is communion in Christ and in the Church that animates, accompanies and sustains the service of charity, both in communities themselves and in emergency situations throughout the world”. (Pope Francis, Private Audience to the General Assembly, May 2019)