Caritas Internationalis Statement: International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence 2023

Caritas’s vision is for a just world in which all people experience the love, compassion and fullness of life. For the women and girls who are victims and survivors of violence, this vision can feel like just a faraway dream.

On the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women 2023, Caritas Internationalis calls for an end to the pandemic of violence against women and girls which continues to pervade societies all over the world – in the home, in the workplace, on the street, during wars and disasters, and, increasingly, in online and digital spaces.

The statistics speak for themselves: still, today, nearly one in three women have been the victims of physical and/or sexual violence at least once in their life. Caritas witnesses every day that conflict, climate change, displacement and natural disasters and other political, social and economic factors increase women’s vulnerability to different forms of violence and discrimination: physical, sexual, and psychological including trafficking, slavery, separation from families, and child marriage.

In the poorest communities where these issues are magnified, Caritas works to assist vulnerable women by providing urgent care to fulfil basic needs and rights: food, medical care, psychosocial support, legal assistance; and by nurturing the integral development of victims and survivors through training, education and empowerment programmes, which enable them to overcome the vicious cycle of violence.

‘The soldiers entered our house, beat my husband and locked the children in the bedroom. The biggest of them sat on my chest while the others raped me. When I recovered, my husband was still lying on the ground; he was dead. I covered him, took the children, and ran. After two days, a woman in a village took me to a health centre where Caritas workers gave me medical care and counselling. Caritas encouraged me to look to the future with hope, and made me believe that I wasn’t guilty. Thanks to this organisation I’m no longer ashamed of what happened to me. Continue to do this for everyone.’
Testimony of a woman helped by Caritas Kongolo, Democratic Republic of the Congo

One of the Caritas Confederation’s strategic priorities up to 2030 is a steadfast commitment to the elimination of the harmful barriers which prevent women and girls from accessing opportunities to learn, lead and participate in decision making at all levels of society.

We are inspired by the words of Pope Francis, who, in his message for the World Day of the Poor in 2021, spoke of the plight of ‘all those women who down the centuries would be silenced and suffer violence,’ and he made a clear connection between this voicelessness, violence and the resulting marginalisation of

---

women. The Pope went on to say, ‘Women, so often discriminated against and excluded from positions of responsibility, are seen in the Gospels to play a leading role in the history of revelation.’

Caritas is working to play its part to ensure that violence can no longer be allowed to limit women and girls from reaching their full potential. By making greater investments in safeguarding, strengthening institutions through policies and accountability, psychosocial and legal support, advocacy and prioritising the inclusion of women, their voices, perspectives and experiences through dedicated funding of programmes and projects from grassroots to global levels.

Alistair Dutton, Secretary General of Caritas Internationalis, said: ‘Violence is clearly one of the major barriers which prevents women and girls from enjoying the fullness of life. Only by tackling harmful cultural behaviours and norms, promoting greater social support and financial autonomy, ensuring access to education, training and livelihoods, and ending cultures of impunity will violence against women be eliminated.’

During these sixteen days of activism from 25 November up to Human Rights Day on 10 December, Caritas will be engaging in a social media campaign to raise the voices and visibility of women who have been silenced and suffered violence and discrimination, and the work that Caritas is doing all over the world to offer hope, to empower women, and to create wider social change in order that violence and discrimination against women and girls can be eliminated once and for all, and that communities can flourish in a holistic, loving, compassionate and full way.