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Press Conference on “COVID-19, Food crisis and integral ecology: the action of the Church”

Intervention by Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson

Intervention by Msgr. Bruno Marie Duffé

Intervention by Reverend Augusto Zampini-Davies

Intervention by Mr. Aloysius John

At 11.30 this morning a press conference was streamed live from the “John Paul II” Hall of the Holy See Press Office, entitled “COVID-19, Food crisis and integral ecology: the action of the Church”.

The speakers were: His Eminence Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson, prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development; Msgr. Bruno Marie Duffé, secretary of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development; Reverend Augusto Zampini-Davies, adjunct secretary of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development; and Mr. Aloysius John, secretary general of Caritas Internationalis.

The following are their interventions:

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Intervention by Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson

The name and the mandate of the new Dicastery suited it well to be the organ of the Holy See to occupy itself with the multi-faceted challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 started as a healthcare issue; but it has affected drastically the economy, jobs/employment, lifestyles, food security, the primary role of Artificial Intelligence and internet security, politics, governance and policies (nationalistic or open and in solidarity),

research and patents. Hardly any aspect of human life and culture is left unscathed. Accordingly, it illustrates Pope Francis' teaching that “*Everything is inter-connected*” (*Laudato si'*, §70, 138, 240), and it corresponds to the mission of the Dicastery to pursue human development *integrally*: in all its dimensions.

And it sounds to me very important, I would say providential in a sense, that we are talking about this crisis and the things we can do together to overcome it, in the time we will celebrate a “*Laudato si' Week*” (from 16 to 24 May), with many initiatives spread all around the world, organised autonomously by the local Churches, associations, NGOs and so on... We really see this crisis is for us, and for every people, an opportunity not to lose to imagine a better future.

In one of the last meetings we had with Pope Francis, He asked us to “prepare the future”: not “prepare for the future”, but prepare it, anticipate it.

So, the pandemic has given a special focus to the activities of the Dicastery and created a priority area “*ad tempus*” which, with the consent of Pope Francis, it calls, a *Vatican COVID-19 Commission*. With the collaboration of *Caritas Internationalis* and other Dicasteries of the Roman Curia, such as, the Dicastery for Communication, the 2nd Section of the Secretariat of State and others, this *commission* attends to the incidence of COVID-19 in the world through the activities of five working groups:

a) A first Working Group reaches out to local Churches to listen to their experience of COVID-19 and see how to strengthen them, as principal actors of their solutions. It encourages the use of *caritas* networks.

b) A second Working Group, in partnership with the Holy See *Academy for Life* and the *Pontifical Academy of the Sciences*, and the multiple organisations which collaborate with the Dicastery, does research and interdisciplinary studies of issues related with the COVID-19 epidemic, thinks of a post COVID-19 society & world, especially, in the areas of ecology, economics, labour, healthcare, politics-governance, communication and security, and formulates new trajectories for post COVID-19 society.

c) A third Working Group, coordinated by the *Dicastery for Communication*, organises the communication strategies to inform about the activities of the Working Groups, and to promote communication among local Churches, with view to helping them to respond authentically and credibly to the post-COVID-19 world.

d) A fourth Working Group, coordinated by the *2nd Section for Relations with States* of the Secretary of State, takes up Holy See activities and relations with other States and Intergovernmental Organisations for advocacy purposes and the sharing of data for multilateral activities.

e) The fifth Working Group is responsible for fundraising to enable the *Vatican COVID-19 Commission* support the activities of local Churches and Catholic Organisations, and its own activities of research, analysis of data and communication.

The *Vatican COVID-19 Commission* is expected to go for a year, unless it becomes necessary to extend its activities.

Intervention by Msgr. Bruno Marie Duffé

I would like to propose three points about the experience of the pandemic and the mission of the Church in this very special context.

1. *What we are experimenting, first of all, is our vulnerability across different levels:*

- a. *Our physical and social vulnerability*: we cannot continue believing that we are all powerful and immune to natural and climatic disorders.
- b. *Our political and ideological vulnerability*: the pandemic has evidenced our deficit in thinking, anticipating crises and the deficit of investing in sanitary equipments and prevention.
- c. *Our economic fragility*: until now we have considered health as a mere instrument to produce more and more, in the logic of vested and short sighted interests. Today we are re-discovering health and solidarity as conditions and pillars of our economy.

2. *Considering this experience, we could distinguish and link 3 urgencies:*

- a. *To share our means* to save lives, without any discrimination: young and old, migrants and the poor. We cannot forget anyone!
- b. *To expand joint assistance projects* and grant help to countries and local communities in need. Showing that the basis of solidarity action is the idea that « we are one human family ».
- c. *To develop thinking and proposals with a prophetic vision*, for economic actors and political leaders, in order to identify which kind of economic models and processes we want to implement, in this context of fear and conflicts of interests. We must think which kind of investments we wish to support for tomorrow?

3. *In this context, we could say that the mission of the Church is:*

- a. *To listen and to accompany* people in their suffering.
- b. *To propose a reflection* about the link between the sanitary, ecological, economic and social dimensions of the crisis, because everything is connected.
- c. *To support new options* to care for nature, biodiversity and human beings.
- d. *To open our doors and to offer hope*, because we believe, as Jesus Christ showed us, life is stronger than death. But we have a responsibility to prioritise the «common good » with respect, complementarity and inclusivity of all.

Intervention by Reverend Augusto Zampini-Davies

1. As Pope Francis said this week, many people died in the last four month, not from coronavirus, but from hunger. We know that in the world, according to FAO, 800 million people remain chronically hungry and that little progress has been made in this regard. We also know that there is a lot of food being lost. Yet, people need to eat; demand on food is estimated to grow 50% by 2050 compared with 2010.
2. Coronavirus is increasing food-related problems. The food crisis, such as the one provoked by COVID, is international and the socioeconomic consequences grow disproportionately, and even catastrophically, once certain thresholds are breached (eg. hospital capacity, soil erosion): (a) restrictions on food exports and imports are affecting supply chains; (b) producers are struggling to get their products to the market; (c) socioeconomic issues and conflicts persist and might get worse.
3. Food crisis affect the most vulnerable people; (a) according to the WFP, 370 million children are at risk of losing school meals due to closures, which are usually the only meals they receive; (b) climate issues continue

to disrupt food production and agriculture with severe consequences on small farmers, (c) the value of society is determined by how it treats its most vulnerable members.

4. We are facing a severe risk in food security. Food crisis causes hunger, hunger affects the poorest people and increases insecurity. Insecurity will lead to violence and more conflicts, which will in turn, cause more poverty.

5. Although COVID has highlighted the fragility of our food systems, it is still an opportunity to change, both in production and consumption patterns and in private and public actions. As *Laudato Si'* (5, 220) reminds us, it is time for a deep and global ecological conversion, one that can inspire us to greater creativity and enthusiasm.

6. What could we do, globally?

a. Accelerate improvements in agricultural productivity but link it with the protection of natural ecosystems and sustainable practices. We need a more effective way of using God's gift of Nature to meet food and environmental goals. If we plunder the earth's resources, we will destroy our sources of both food and health. (cf. *Laudato Si'*, 32)

b. Support the cause of the international community on food coalitions.

c. Encourage to divert funds from weapons to food.

d. Develop a set of emergency labor measures for people working in the agricultural sector (aside from the health sector).

e. Support and promote policies which address the Climate Emergency so as to counter its effects on the poorest communities and countries, particularly its impacts on food production.

7. What could we do as ordinary people?

a. Reduce food loss and waste.

b. Start changing our diets, eating seasonal food, and avoiding high pollutant products.

c. COVID has shown that we do not need as many things as we think. We can be more with less.

d. Every small gesture of care counts, as Saint Therese of Lisieux taught us (cf. *Laudato Si'*, 230-231).

Intervention by Mr. Aloysius John

CREATIVE SOLIDARITY IS THE CRY OF THE MOMENT,
CARITAS CONTINUES TO SERVE THE POOREST.

Caritas Internationalis has been in the front line of the COVID-19 response since the beginning and its members have scaled up their action adapting some of the ongoing programs towards the COVID-19 response to meet the rapidly expanding needs.

As the Holy Father told us, "At this tragic moment of human history, I want the Church to be present through the work of Charity and if you do not do it who will do it?". Caritas Internationalis, in line with the Holy Father's call, is

working very closely with the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development (DPIHD) to concretise this by creating the Covid-19 Response fund.

So far, 32 projects were received and 14 have already been approved and funded. Any other approved projects will be funded when further contributions make this possible.

Thanks to these projects, families are helped with basic food assistance, hygiene kits, items like soap, diapers and cash assistance for subsidising rent and other urgent needs. Awareness building is also a crucial action for prevention and mitigation: Caritas is providing people at risk with reliable information on the pandemic and the way the communities can protect themselves and the others. Caritas India Tamil Nadu Regional Coordinator said, "Thanks to the determined work of the Church in which the bishops, priest and religious were mobilised, we were able to encourage the poorest to live in their homes by helping them." This is just one example of hundreds of small but very important action to contribute in the prevention of the propagation of the virus.

Through the COVID-19 Response Fund, to which the DPIHD also contributed, the Caritas confederation is helping more than 7,8 million people in 14 countries, including Ecuador, India, Palestine, Bangladesh, Lebanon and Burkina Faso.

In addition to the COVID-19 Response Fund, internal solidarity mechanisms have already been activated within the Confederation. The support offered by national Caritas organisations to other national Caritas and local partners is helping 1,9 million beneficiaries by funding programmes for a total of more than 9 million euros in different parts of the world.

The COVID-19 tragedy brought to evidence too strongly what *Laudato Si'* has been emphasising. It was global, cross cutting and systemic. Inspired by the call of the Holy Father to respond immediately and agilely to the huge and new needs created by COVID-19, Caritas is already helping almost ten million people.

But unfortunately there are hundreds of thousands more who need our help. The projects not yet financed by the COVID-19 Response Fund would allow to offer support to over 840 thousand people in serious difficulty. As in South Africa where the national Caritas organisation does not have enough food to distribute to the thousands of migrants who are lining up in front of its offices every day because they have nothing to live on."

In this dramatic moment in which the whole of humanity must be united in solidarity before this tragic pandemic, Caritas Internationalis firmly reiterates its appeal to the international community for:

- Removing economic sanctions on Iran, Lebanon, Syria, Libya and Venezuela so that aid to the affected population can be guaranteed and Caritas, through the Church, can continue to play its role of support for the poor and most vulnerable.
 - Cancellation of the poorest countries' debt or at least cancellation of debt interest payments for 2020.
 - International aid continues to be donated to countries in need and not diverted to other purposes.
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