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The Pope's address to the Representative Council of Caritas Internationalis

At 11 a.m. today, in the Clementine Hall of the Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father received in audience the members of the Representative Council of Caritas Internationalis. The Pope responded to questions from some of those present, gave an impromptu address and handed to the representatives a copy of his prepared discourse, the full text of which is given below.

“The Church exists to evangelise, but evangelisation requires her to adapt to different situations, taking family and social life into account, as well as international life with special attention to peace, justice and development. At the opening of the Synod on New Evangelisation, Pope Benedict XVI recalled that the two pillars of evangelisation are ‘Confessio et Caritas’, and I too devoted a chapter of the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* to the social dimension of evangelisation, reaffirming the Church’s preference for the poor. Therefore we are called to act against the social exclusion of the weakest and to work for their integration. Our societies, indeed, are often dominated by the throwaway culture; they need to overcome indifference and self-centredness in order to learn the art of solidarity. ‘We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves’.

This enables us to understand the fundamental nature of the mission of the various national Caritas and their specific role in the Church. Indeed, they are not social agencies, but rather ecclesial organisms that share the mission of the Church. As is written in your statutes, you are called to assist the Pope and the bishops in their ministry of charity. Today’s urgent social demands require that you put into play what St. John Paul II defined as the ‘new creativity in charity’; this is made concrete not only in the effectiveness of the assistance lent, but above all in the capacity to become a neighbour, accompanying the most disadvantaged with an attitude of fraternal sharing. It is about making charity and justice shine in the world in the light of the Gospel and the teaching of the Church, involving the poor themselves so that they become the true protagonists of their own development.

I thank you on behalf of the Church for what you do for the least among us. I encourage you to continue in this mission, that makes the Church into a true travelling companion, close to the heart and the hopes of the men and women of this world. Continue to take the message of the Gospel of joy all over the world, especially to those who are left behind, but also to those who have the power to change things, because it is possible to change. Poverty, hunger, disease and oppression are not inevitable and cannot represent permanent situations. Trusting in the strength of the Gospel, we can truly contribute to changing things or at least improving them. We

can reaffirm the dignity of those who await a sign of our love, and protect and build our common home together.

I invite you to have prophetic courage, to refuse all that which humiliates man, and every form of exploitation that degrades. Continue to bring those small and large signs of hospitality and solidarity that have the capacity to illuminate the life of children and the elderly, migrants and refugees in search of peace. I am very happy to learn that Caritas Internationalis will carry out a campaign precisely on the theme of migration. I hope that this good initiative will open many hearts to welcoming refugees and migrants, so they can truly feel at home in our communities. May you take care to support, with renewed effort, the processes of development and the paths of peace in the countries from where these brothers and sisters of ours flee or leave in search of a better future.

May you be artisans of peace and reconciliation between peoples, between communities, between believers. Put into play all your energies, all your effort, to work in harmony with other communities of faith that, like you, place the dignity of the person at the centre of their attention. Fight against poverty and, at the same time, learn from the poor. Let yourselves be inspired and guided by their simple and essential life, by their values, by their sense of solidarity and sharing, by their capacity to rise up from difficulties, and above all from their lived experience of the suffering Christ, He Who is the one Lord and Saviour. Learn, therefore, also from their life of prayer and their trust in God.

I hope that, with the pastoral support and attention of the bishops, you will increasingly be witnesses of a generous ministry of charity, helping the community of believers to be a place for the proclamation of the Gospel, the celebration of the Eucharist and service to the poor, in joy. I invoke the intercession of Mary, our heavenly Mother, and while I ask you to pray for me, I gladly implore the Lord's blessing upon you and those who support your work".
