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## Audience with members of the Administration Board of the “Populorum Progressio” Foundation

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the Administration Board of the “Populorum Progressio” Foundation, to whom he addressed the following words:

### Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

I thank Bishop del Río for his introduction; I greet Bishop Cabrejos, President of CELAM, and Sr. Alessandra Smerilli, Secretary of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development; and I greet each and every one of you.

Saint Paul VI, on 26 March 1969, the date of the second anniversary of his Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, established a Fund to help poor farmers and to promote agrarian reform, social justice and peace in Latin America, following the guidelines offered by the Bishops of that continent.

In 1992, on the occasion of the fifth centenary of the beginning of the evangelization of the American continent, the Fourth General Assembly of the Latin American Episcopate met. On the occasion Saint John Paul II wished to establish an autonomous “*Populorum Progressio*” Foundation to promote the integral development of the poorest peasant communities in Latin America. He wrote: “This is to be a gesture of the loving solidarity of the Church towards the most abandoned and those most in need of protection, such as the indigenous peoples, peoples of mixed racial backgrounds, and Afro-Americans. ... The Foundation is aimed towards collaborating with all those who, conscious of the suffering condition of the Latin American peoples, wish to contribute to their integral development, according to a just and appropriate application of the social teaching of the Church” (*Chirograph establishing the “Populorum Progressio” Foundation*, 13 February 1992).

I wish to express my gratitude to those who in these thirty years have worked for this Foundation, which is now changing its form but – I want to emphasize – will maintain its mission and remain a work of the Pope’s charity.

Many families in Latin America and in the Caribbean survive in subhuman conditions. As the concluding Document of Aparecida underlines, “the excluded are not only ‘exploited’, but also ‘supernumerary’, ‘discarded’” (no. 65). The Ecclesial Assembly of the Continent, which is still developing, was an opportunity to listen to the cry of the poor, and the Synod on Amazonia brought us closer to the reality of exclusion in which indigenous and Afro-descendant communities live. The four dreams I wanted to share with Amazonia extend to the entire continent and to all humanity. It is necessary that “in the face of present-day attempts to eliminate or ignore others, we may prove capable of responding with a new vision of fraternity and social friendship that will not remain at the level of words” (Encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, 6).

By walking the synodal path we must grow as a “Samaritan” Church that comforts, engages and stoops to touch the wounds of Christ’s suffering flesh in the people (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 24). He wanted to identify himself with the poorest and most marginalized, and offers us his merciful presence in them (cf. *Mt* 25:31-46).

Our hope is that these initiatives of solidarity will show that it is possible to change, that reality is not paralyzed. If they are undertaken wisely and consistently, they will be a sign that we hope may motivate many.

The reform of the Roman Curia that we are pursuing, and which has found expression in *Praedicate Evangelium*, is confronting us with a series of necessary changes. Among them is the one concerning the *Populorum Progressio* Foundation, which is thirty years old and has served the cause of the poor on the continent, in accordance with the will of Saint Paul VI, confirmed by Saint John Paul II. In this context, it is necessary to promote a stronger link with the local Churches, in order to make integral development programmes more effective in the most neglected indigenous and Afro-descendent communities, immersed in poverty and abasement.

The poor must not be viewed as recipients of charity. They must be an active part of the discernment of the most urgent needs. “We do not need plans drawn up by a few for the few, or an enlightened or outspoken minority which claims to speak for everyone” (*Evangelii gaudium*, 239). It is important to liberate ourselves from paternalistic mentalities, which widen the gap between those who are called to form one family.

Already John Paul II, in his Message for the 10th anniversary of the Foundation, emphasized how “it is noteworthy that the particular Churches in Latin America also participate in financing the projects. Besides this, a characteristic of the work of the Foundation is that the persons responsible for approving projects and deciding on the distribution of funds come from the very areas in which the projects are implemented” (14 June 2002).

For these reasons, wishing that the aid to the development of projects remains an expression of the Pope’s charity, but does not have its centre in the Roman Curia, and also following the line of simplification, I have entrusted the task of helping us in the analysis of the projects and their implementation to CELAM. The Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development will maintain responsibility for the administration of the fund that will be committed to the service of this mission.

As Benedict XVI affirmed to participants in the meeting of the Administration Board of the “Populorum Progressio” Foundation on 14 June 2007, “This endeavour, embarked upon fifteen years ago, must continue in accordance with the principles that have marked its commitment to promote the dignity of every human being and the fight against poverty”.

I reiterate my grateful appreciation to those who have given their service in the Foundation. And I wish also to express my gratitude to the international bodies that have collaborated and I encourage them to continue in this effort.

The Virgin Mary, in the Visitation, shows herself to us as a thoughtful and caring in serving. May she urge us, with her motherly affection and tenderness, to be close to the poorest and the forgotten, who God certainly does not forget.

Dear brothers and sisters, thank you for your commitment. I bless you heartily, and I accompany you with my prayer. And you too, please, do not forget to pray for me.

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