



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE **BOLLETTINO**

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Audience with volunteers of the Opera for the Promotion of Literacy in the World (OPAM)

This morning, the Holy Father Francis received in audience, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the volunteers of the *Opera* for the Promotion of Literacy in the World (OPAM).

The following is the Pope's address to those present at the audience:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear friends of OPAM, good morning and welcome to you all!

I thank the president for the greeting addressed on behalf of you all. It is significant that you, Don Robert, are first and foremost a witness, because as a child you were able to study thanks to the help of OPAM. You could not have imagined that one day you would be in Rome to direct this organization... These are God's surprises! But God wants to need our solidarity.

You have recently celebrated fifty years since Don Carlo Muratore established this service, because, in his missionary experience, he had realized that an essential part of evangelization and human promotion is *education*. They were the years in which Paul VI wrote the Encyclical *Populorum progressio*, setting out clearly development as the way of peace. And there cannot be integral human development without education. Let us give thanks to God for the apostolic zeal of Don Carlo, for his big heart and his open mind. As well as for his successor Don Aldo Martini, who guided the *Opera* for twenty years, taking on board the demands of historical reality and the magisterium of the Church. And the same gratitude is due to the collaborators and the many volunteers and supporters, who in these fifty years have enabled OPAM to accomplish and carry out thousands of projects and distance adoptions in more than eighty countries.

I would like to return to the appeal of *Populorum progressio*. When we reread these great pontifical documents of the Sixties – the same applies to Saint John XXIII's *Pacem in terris* – we realize how timely they are and how, unfortunately, their message has *not* been received! Yes, in words, many have expressed their consensus,

but in practice the model of development has not changed, to this day. This means that, despite the many and generous works of solidarity accomplished at civil and ecclesial level, the *causes* of underdevelopment have not been eliminated. So, your work aims precisely at removing one of the causes of underdevelopment, namely illiteracy. Paul VI wrote: “Basic education is the first objective for any nation seeking to develop itself. Lack of education is as serious as lack of food” (Encyclical Letter *Populorum progressio*, 35). Indeed, I have seen that your logo reads: *OPAM – Bread of education*. Yes, it is. And the Pope added: “We also rejoice at the good work accomplished in this field by private initiative, by the public authorities, and by international organizations. These are the primary agents of development, because they enable man to act for himself”. There, this is where your work comes in.

Today I would like to say to you: the “dream” of *Populorum progressio* is the same as that of the Encyclical *Fratelli tutti*. It is the dream of the Church, or better, the dream of God, who wants a world in which we can all live as brothers and sisters in full dignity. I thank you because with your daily commitment you cooperate in realizing this dream of “fraternity and social friendship that will not remain at the level of words” (*Fratelli tutti*, 6). When, in collaboration with missionaries who work “in the field”, you study and implement a project of education or school support, or distance adoption, you contribute to “engendering an open world” (*ibid.*, 87), where everyone “is accompanied at every stage of life, not only by providing for their basic needs, but by enabling them to give the best of themselves” (*ibid.*, 110).

For this reason, dear brothers and sisters, keep going! Try to keep the quality of your work high, so that it may always be promotional. Nourish it continually with the lymph of the Gospel, so that the Holy Spirit may keep alive the aspiration, motivations and style of your commitment. May Our Lady accompany you and give you the joy of “hastening” towards so many situations that are in need of help. I bless you, and all those who in any way collaborate with OPAM, from my heart. And I ask you, please, to pray for me. Thank you!
