

Brussels, 1 September 2015

To the Presidents, Secretaries General and Directors of the Caritas Europa member organisations,

Our concern for the refugees and for the danger to lose humanity in Europe

Dear friends,

Europe is living challenging and demanding times. Caritas is amidst current events that have the potential to change the shape of our societies for the long term. Yet, Caritas can contribute to shaping society with concrete actions of love and messages of hope.

As Europe witnesses increased movements of migrants and asylum seekers from different countries - mainly from Syria and the Middle East but also from Africa - Caritas is called upon to intervene.

We are confronted with a pressing need for humanitarian aid and positive narrative that fosters a welcoming environment to those in need. We are concerned not only about the political representatives of our nations, but also the Church and our own organisations.

50 million people are fleeing from war and violence in the world. 5 million only from Syria and Iraq. The World Food Programme denounces the lack of financial means to provide the most basic assistance in the refugee camps in the Middle East. Nearly 2 million refugees, mostly Syrian, are living in Turkey. In July alone, 107,500 migrants arrived to the EU, half of whom came to Greece. Thousands are either arriving or crossing European borders each day. More than 100,000 have crossed the Macedonian, Serbian and Hungarian borders this year, asking for asylum when they enter the EU. 20,000 migrants arrived in Italy only in July, coming from Eritrea, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Gambia and Bangladesh, all conflict regions. Between 30,000 and 40,000 migrants are stuck in Morocco trying to enter the EU through the Spanish border. 3,000 migrants are trying to cross from Calais to the UK.

Uncountable stories of death can be told; for many people who died on their way, nobody can tell their story. Children, women, and men who survived are exhausted and traumatised due to war and their terrible journeys.

Few European governments are assuming their moral duty to welcome the people fleeing from violence. Few European policy makers are courageous enough to speak clearly to their population, asking for solidarity and preparing for long term migration flows to and within Europe. Many European governments are instead looking away, encouraging people to journey on to neighbouring borders, proposing to receive ridiculously low numbers of people – compared to the dimension of the drama -, or even

discriminating against migrants on religious grounds or other criteria. Many policy makers are even fostering xenophobic and racist campaigns.

In this context, Caritas is very active in the countries of origin, transit and in the main receiving countries: with food, shelter, hygiene products, psychological support, etc. Caritas is also active doing advocacy work with the governments, asking for humane treatment of the people, sometimes behind the scenes in the ministries, sometimes in public media. Also, Caritas that are not directly affected are showing their solidarity.

This is a solidarity based in the faith in our Father, and the subsequent sense of fraternity. We hear often the cry of these displaced people saying: 'we are human beings', asking for respect, entry and... love. They speak to our Christian heart asking us to communicate the love we receive from the Lord to all of them. It is not an easy situation, not for them and not for the receiving countries. I am convinced there is a need for much dialogue among responsible people in the different contexts: national governments, city governments, Caritas, diocesan representatives, and all kind of voluntary services. We can only hope a good path can be found to work together for a peaceful integration of these victims of violence, poverty, and abandonment.

When we read the Scripture and see that the people of God was on the way to better lands; when we hear God say to them that they should remember and not forget, once they become rich in the new country, that it was God who led them through the desert into the promised land. Then we think of the privilege position most of us have to be born in a country where peace and prosperity flourish (Cfr. Deut. 8, 17-18).

Pope Francis insists upon the right of all people to integral development: "Underlying the principle of the common good is respect for the human person as such, endowed with basic and inalienable rights ordered to his or her integral development... the common good calls for social peace, the stability and security provided by a certain order which cannot be achieved without particular concern for distributive justice. Whenever this is violated, violence always ensues" (Laudato Si' 157).

It is our concern in Caritas Europa, that justice is done to all, that violence is stopped. That is why we do not only care for the concrete people at our borders, but also engage in reflection and study about the right of all people. We do not want to do this on our own, but in coordination with all organisations of good will.

We recall the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church: "The Church is close to refugees not only with her pastoral presence and material support, but also with her commitment to defend their human dignity: 'Concern for refugees must lead us to reaffirm and highlight universally recognised human rights, and to ask that the effective recognition of these rights be guaranteed to refugees'" (Nr. 504).

Caritas in Europe, as the diaconia of the Church in this part of the world, is facing one of the major systemic challenges of current times, a situation that will continue and grow over the coming years. We are challenged to offer help to the people, enabling environments in which each of us enjoys their dignity and humanity. We are challenged to not enter into competition among our own organisations, so that help arrives quickly

where it is most needed. In the current situation and with so many Caritas organisations involved, coordinating this help is more important than ever. We can't forget but have to strengthen our effort to address the root causes of migration in the homelands and neighbouring countries.

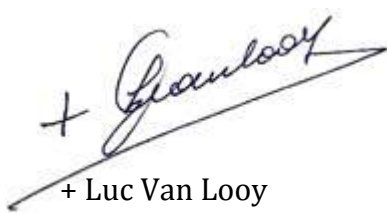
The support and care for our helpers –Caritas' employees and volunteers- can't be forgotten either. Likewise, attention is needed to foster values in our parishes and our societies, to stop the spread of the globalisation of indifference, and instead to foster humanity, ,fraternity and global justice as crucial elements of the European identity. We need to prepare ourselves for the future, as more migrants, with diverse cultural and religious backgrounds, are expected to arrive, and remain. We must prepare for eventual tensions and positioning of people against each other.

Our advocacy work, i.e. the political dimension of charity (Caritas in Veritate 7) or our duty to lend our voice to the causes of the poor (Evangelii Gaudium 198), has to be reinforced, delivering consistent messages at local, national, European and global levels. Caritas is not there to solve all or even the main problems. It is the responsibility of the governments to act and give long-term durable solutions. Caritas has to denounce those policies and actions that threaten the dignity of the migrants, contribute with ideas for possible solutions, and present, through the concrete Caritas services and projects the most promising initiatives, those who give the humanity back to migrants and so, also to European societies.

And all this is happening in a Europe faced with poverty and financial decline; where Caritas is already attempting to respond to the needs of so many Europeans; the very recent economic crisis has increased inequality and poverty in our countries. Throughout, Caritas remains committed to the people most in need.

Dear friends, the situation which we encounter today in Europe asks of us a great heart but also an attentive mind, so that we can find good and durable solutions for people who are victims of war, violence, discrimination and poverty. We are proud to know that so many volunteers and Caritas collaborators are giving the best of themselves to cater for the needs of these loved neighbours. In our prayer and concern and also with our deeds, coordinating and giving support to the humanitarian, social and advocacy actions, we are with you, and of course, with the migrants and refugees as well. We hope that on all levels and in all countries, solutions may be found to offer a better life to all. You can count on our utmost efforts and support for the work that has to be done.

With our most sincere appreciation,



+ Luc Van Looy
President



Jorge Nuño Mayer
Secretary General