

CARITAS EUROPA 5th Migration Forum

Building Bridges or Barriers *Exploring the dynamics between migration and development*

20th September 2007
Costa de Caparica-Portugal

Your Eminences
Your Excellencies
Colleagues and Friends of CARITAS from around the world!

Let me say firstly that I do not profess to be an expert on migration issues and would not presume to lecture you on your own specialism. What I have to say to you today therefore is more in the form of a reflection on some of the issues we will be discussing over the next three days and how they relate to the core values and strategies of Caritas Internationalis as a global confederation.

Reading the excellent discussion papers that have been prepared for this forum, two stark truths stand out for me:

- The first is that the forced migration of peoples is an international scandal that requires an urgent global solution.
- The second is that for as long as we continue to live in a world of obscene inequality, we will always have to address the issues raised by migration.

These two truths highlight the two-way relationship between international migration and development.

With the first, development has a central role to play in combating the **causes of forced migration**.

With the second, migration plays a role – either positive or negative – in the **development** of communities and countries.

For me, the first issue is relatively clear cut: in one way or another, the forced migration of peoples can be attributed to poverty and social inequality, whether we are talking about migration as a result of conflict, famine, natural disasters, persecution or

inequitable access to natural resources. The eradication of poverty and social inequality lies at the very heart of what CARITAS stands for. Our preferential option for the poor commits us to combating dehumanising poverty, which robs people of their dignity and humanity. We believe in the universal destination of the world's goods; and that any economic, social, political or cultural structure which opposes or oppresses and prevents change towards justice is sinful.

At the Caritas General Assembly in June, we identified three strategic priorities for our global programme of work: response to humanitarian crises and disaster preparedness; Integral Human Development; and Peace-building.

All three of these strategic priorities have a role to play in combating forced migration.

Clearly, if people have the resources to respond effectively to natural disasters, and are prepared for them, the likelihood of mass migration is greatly reduced. To this end we are working towards a strengthening of capacity in all our Member Organisations working in disaster prone regions, as well as improvements in the Secretariat's ability to provide co-ordination in major emergencies. We are also building our humanitarian advocacy capacity and seeking greater participation and collaboration with other international actors, including NGO networks, the United Nations family, and other faith and inter-faith based organisations.

Integral Human Development is obviously at the heart of our efforts to alleviate the crippling poverty which forces people to migrate merely to survive. But it is also concerned with the increasingly pressing issue of climate change which threatens to displace large numbers of people from their homes as a result of crop failures, lack of water, or rising sea levels. We will be addressing climate change as a matter of urgency and highlighting the particularly devastating consequences it has for the poor.

Caritas has a global reach and influence which government institutions do not have and our work on climate change will be integral to our humanitarian and development programmes. Our actions are grounded in the belief that humankind has a duty of stewardship towards nature; most critical of all, in securing a socially just balance of responsibility between rich and poor.

Finally, our work on peace building is aimed at ending and preventing the appalling conflicts that have uprooted millions of people from their homes in recent years. It is my aim that Caritas organisations will be known and acknowledged for our conflict transformation programmes and human rights monitoring. These will challenge the cultural, local and national governance structures which undermine the ability of communities to live sustainable and just lives. A crucial part of my role as Secretary General is to coordinate the strengthening of advocacy capacity on good governance in peace building. We will promote links with civil society groups, ensuring CARITAS' work is sensitive to cultural and gender issues, and involving poor people across rival ethnic and faith divisions in decision making. CARITAS also has a role to play in coordinating peace building and advocacy at international level, and promoting inter-faith dialogue and global campaigns on specific conflict issues.

When it comes to forced migration, I think the issues and strategy are clear; so let me now turn to the second of my two 'truths on migration': that is the fact that **as long as there is gross inequality in the world, there will continue to be migration.** I suspect that consideration of what we might call 'ongoing' migration – and in particular, its links with development – will provoke some of our most interesting debates over the next few days.

I see this type of migration, at least in part, as a product of globalisation. The increasing connectivity that is a feature of globalisation highlights the inequalities that exist in our world; and it facilitates the movement of peoples; while the economics of globalisation seems to always create winners and losers, exacerbating the inequalities that already exist.

There is a tendency among the richer nations of the world to want to cherry-pick the bits of the globalisation phenomenon that suit them; they build bridges with one hand, and put up barriers with the other: "We want you to come and work for us, but not you..." "You can bring your skills to our country, but don't bring your culture."

Globalisation also encourages us to think of migrants as an economic resource, a mobile labour force, a form of capital. Although the economic view of migration may open doors and build bridges, it tends to ignore the effects of migration on individuals and families.

Maybe there are also dangers in the development view of migration? Should we be seduced by what we might call the 'spin-off' benefits of migration? Can there really be a 'triple-win' form of migration that benefits country of origin, country of destination, and the migrant? How do we measure the benefit to a migrant? Does a migrant benefit if he is financially better-off, but his children grow up without a father?

Can we speak of migrants as 'agents of development'? When we consider the development impact of remittances sent home by migrants (which are almost three times the value of Official Development Assistance to low-income countries); or the role of women migrants in the promotion of human rights and gender equality in their home countries, do we also consider the human cost in terms of the impact on migrants themselves, their families and communities?

When we speak of the rights of people to migrate through choice, what kind of a choice are we talking about? Is it an informed choice? If you are living barely above the poverty line and you choose to leave your family to give them a better standard of living, is that migration by choice, or simply a different kind of forced migration?

Here the issues are far from clear cut – at least to me! And I certainly don't intend to pre-empt our discussions on these topics, but I would like to suggest that while we consider these issues, we always keep in mind the guiding values and principles of our CARITAS confederation. I am thinking in particular here of our belief in the dignity of the human person, which is the founding moral value of Caritas Internationalis.

Let us remember that migration is not essentially about economics; it is about people. Migrants are not an economic resource, a form of capital – they are husbands, wives, mothers, fathers and children. At its most basic level, migration is a result of the efforts of individuals and families to survive and improve their

lives. The problems caused by migration impact on individuals and their families, people with faces and names.

Back in May this year a startling image appeared on our television screens and in our newspapers. The picture showed a huge fishing net being towed behind a trawler. But on closer inspection, it revealed a chilling reality: around the edge of the net, 27 migrants were clinging on for their lives. They had been abandoned by people traffickers in a small wooden boat that soon began to sink. The ships' captain refused to take them on board, fearing that a change in course would jeopardise his valuable catch of fish. So they clung to the net, ignored by the captain, until rescued by the Italian navy.

It was an unforgettable image... and it is a powerful metaphor for our world: the poorest people clinging precariously to life, as the ship steams blindly on.

I hope that at the end of this migration forum we will have developed a coherent approach to migration and a clear advocacy message that will help us to change the course of this ship.

Lesley-Anne Knight
Secretary General



Caritas Internationalis
Palazzo San Calisto
00120 Città del Vaticano

Email: knight@caritas.va
Tel.: +39 06 698 79702
Fax: +39 06 698 87237