

**Meeting of Bishops of the *Caritas Africa* region on the identity and mission of *Caritas*
in the light of the encyclical “*Deus Caritas Est*”
Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo
20 – 22 November 2012**

FINAL DECLARATION

I. THE EVENT

We, 52 Bishops from 34 countries of the *Caritas Africa* region, meeting in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, from 20 to 22 November 2012, at the invitation of the Pontifical Council *Cor Unum* and *Caritas Africa*, have in prayer enriched our reflection and understanding on the theme: **Identity and mission of *Caritas* in the light of the encyclical “*Deus Caritas Est*”.**

We express our gratitude to the Holy Father Benedict XVI for:

- i. The depth and theological density of the encyclical “*DEUS CARITAS EST*” which confirms the very place of the exercise of charity and *Caritas* at the heart of the mission of the Church as an expression of the communion of love that finds its source in the Holy Trinity.
- ii. The guidelines of the post synodal Apostolic Exhortation “*Africae Munus*” which constitutes a manual for the overall pastoral care of the Church in Africa today.
- iii. The new statutes and internal rules of *Caritas Internationalis* and the General Decree that accompanies them are clear indications of the importance given by the Holy Father to *Caritas Internationalis* as a specific body of the Universal Church under the authority of the Holy See.

We thank His Eminence Cardinal Robert Sarah for his availability and the involvement of the Pontifical Council *Cor Unum* in the organisation of this meeting, for his message given to us, as well as for his active participation in our discussion.

We extend our thanks to *Caritas Internationalis* President, His Eminence Cardinal Oscar Andrés Rodríguez Maradiaga, for his presence at our meeting thus witnessing to us the support of the whole Confederation.

We are also thankful to His Eminence Cardinal Laurent Monsengwo, Archbishop of Kinshasa, as well as to the National Episcopal Conference of Congo (CENCO), represented by its President, Bishop Nicolas Djomo, for their availability and their contribution to the success of our meeting.

We express our gratitude to the authorities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for their presence at the opening ceremony and for all facilities granted to the delegations from other African countries and elsewhere.

II. THE THEME: Identity and Mission of *Caritas* in the light of *Deus Caritas Est*

In a global context characterized by a dangerous growth of contemporary theories and ideologies questioning the vision of the human person created in the image and likeness of God, we approve the theme of this meeting and find it most appropriate.

Following the various communications, exchanges and sharing of experiences, we reaffirm that the exercise of charity belongs to the very nature of the Church and is an integral part of its mission. It must therefore be carefully organized socially and pastorally in the same way as the other pastoral pillars that are the proclamation of the word and the liturgy. It is placed under the authority of the Bishop. In fact *“The Church's deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility: of proclaiming the word of God (kerygma-martyria), celebrating the sacraments (leitourgia), and exercising the ministry of charity (diakonia). These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable. For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being.” (Deus Caritas Est, 25 a)*

III. COMMITMENTS

1. We reaffirm the Trinitarian, ecclesial and spiritual dimensions of *Caritas*, and we recognize the importance of the Diocesan *Caritas* as an instrument for the Bishop to organize his pastoral charity. We are committed to strengthening our communion as respective church pastors and to working for more harmony and coordination between our Diocesan *Caritas* and our National *Caritas*. We shall also continue all help and mutual capacity-building-initiatives in a spirit of Christian solidarity and South-South self-help.

2. We are more than ever aware that the exercise of charity is a constitutive dimension of evangelisation and of the need to convert ourselves and to convert the entire ecclesial community to the service of the poor.
3. We are committed to effectively assuming our responsibility as stated in *Deus Caritas Est*: “In conformity with the episcopal structure of the Church, the Bishops, as successors of the Apostles, are charged with the primary responsibility for carrying out in the particular Churches the programme set forth in the Acts of the Apostles (cf. 2:42-44): today as in the past, the Church as God's family must be a place where help is given and received, and at the same time, a place where people are also prepared to serve those outside her confines who are in need of help.” (*Deus Caritas Est*, 32).
4. We will also be sure to implement or improve the structures of governance at all levels of the charity action for a genuine and effective testimony as a sign of loyalty to Christ, in the spirit of the *Caritas Internationalis* Confederation.
5. We will work to promote a greater synergy within *Caritas Internationalis* and between our different socio-pastoral episcopal commissions, especially the Justice and Peace commission, to promote the cohesion and unity of action, the judicious use of resources and ecclesial communion.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The training of our priests, our seminarians, other agents of evangelization (catechists, religious men and women ...) and lay faithful must take into account aspects related to the exercise of pastoral charity.
2. Caritas staff must be trained on the theological and spiritual dimensions of Christian charity. The staff must combine professionalism with the formation of the heart (cf. *Deus Caritas Est* 31a). To this end, we will ensure their spiritual accompaniment.
3. Staff working in our socio-charitable organizations must adhere totally to such Catholic doctrine as formulated by the Magisterium of the Church.
4. The statutes of our National *Caritas* and of *Caritas Africa* will have to be revisited in the light of the new statutes of *Caritas Internationalis* in view of their harmonization within the confederation and in communion with the universal Church.
5. The Catholic agencies of sister Churches, and in particular Caritas organisations, who assure us of the communion of their Churches and of their people, must

scrupulously respect our values, our cultures, our anthropological beliefs and our pastoral orientations.

6. The commitment of our respective Churches alongside the poor is well known. It is unacceptable that we are sometimes offered help with conditions that humiliate us and infantilize us. We invite one and all to show us their Christian solidarity in a spirit of cooperation and fraternal communion.
7. The opening in our countries of offices by some sister *Caritas* organisations from northern countries poses problems when they come to compete with our own *Caritas*, undermining or discrediting them. We encourage all our Episcopal Conferences to verify the existence of memoranda of understanding and to revisit those signed for many years ago with the northern *Caritas* organisations that are in our countries in order to evaluate them and make necessary adjustments.
8. We heard testimony of harmonious cooperation with some of these organisations in some countries. We welcome these achievements and we express our gratitude to the many *Caritas* members from abroad who bring us their generous support in our ministry of Charity. We salute the memory of all the martyrs of charity, including many missionaries, who have sacrificed their lives in the course of relief operations at home and elsewhere in the world.
9. We encourage *Caritas Africa*, in collaboration with National *Caritas* members, to conduct an inventory of fraternal cooperation best practices so that they may be celebrated in our Churches, in our *Caritas* organisations and throughout the Confederation.
10. We call upon our representatives in governing bodies of the Confederation to convey our concerns at this level and to draw the attention of other members of the *Caritas* family.

We entrust our whole ministry and exercise of charity to the intercession and protection of Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Africa and Our Lady of Peace.

Kinshasa, 22 November 2012