

Visit to Caritas Internationalis – Monday, April 28, 2008 (Sister Ann Marie Paul)

At Caritas Internationalis, we were greeted by the Secretary General, **Lesley-Anne Knight**, and two members of her staff, **Sebastien Dechamps** and **Dolores Bachmann**. Inspired and driven by Catholic Social Teaching, Caritas Internationalis (CI, or “Caritas”) is a confederation of 162 Catholic relief, development and social service organizations working to build a better world, especially for the poor and oppressed, in over 200 countries and territories. In her introduction, Ms. Knight stressed the importance of working in partnership and empowering poor communities to find their own solutions. She shared her vision for CI as one of becoming professionals of an anti-poverty agenda. CI’s Global Operational Plan for 2007-2011, “Witnesses of Charity, Builders of Peace,” includes globalizing solidarity in emergencies, integral human development, and building sustainable peace – no small agenda!

Sebastien Dechamps, CI Liaison Officer: We heard about the work that CI does in combating trafficking and received the 2005 document, *The Caritas Internationalis Commitment on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings*. Additionally, the November 2007 Joint Declaration on Human Trafficking by the USG/UISG and Caritas was a most interesting example of the power of networking and partnerships. This Declaration calls on religious institutes of men and women worldwide and on Caritas Internationalis and its member organizations to consolidate their collaboration in countering the trafficking of human beings. Caritas also submitted a statement to the Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking in Vienna in February 2008. The essence of this statement is that abject poverty is the main driver of human trafficking. Notably, Caritas initiated the ecumenical COATNET network (Christian Organisations Against Trafficking). See <http://www.coatnet.org> for more information.

Dolores Bachmann, CI Emergency Coordinator: A constant increase in disasters is occurring world-wide. In fact, natural disasters will likely be a key element in the failure to meet the Millennium Development Goals.

- Why should the church/Caritas respond to disasters? Many reasons exist: the gospel and the social justice mission of the church, the presence of CI all over the world, CI infrastructure and facilities, the possibility of a holistic response.
- How does CI respond? A few examples are: early response, CI is “tasked” by bishops to respond, the local Caritas is responsible for coordination, advocacy and press statements.
- What can we do? A few suggestions are: link into Caritas Disaster Response, especially to commit buildings and facilities in times of disaster, work with national Caritas to ensure that Sisters are up-to-date with professional disaster response standards, support Caritas emergency appeals.

Lesley-Anne Knight: The Women, Faith, and Development Alliance (WFDA) is focused on one “big idea”: to join women and men in international faith, development and women's organizations to mobilize around the bold moral imperative of ending global poverty and empowering women and girls. WFDA launched its international action and advocacy campaign at a summit held in Washington, DC, from April 13-15. This summit involved world leaders, CEO’s of development organizations, corporate leaders, and leaders of denominations and religious groups. See the website, <http://www.wfd-alliance.org> for more information.

The “final word” from the Secretary General: The ongoing level of poverty today is a shame. The number of people who die needlessly is a scandal. In 2008, the number of people who die of hunger is wrong; it is a sin. The Catholic Church is in a unique position to respond because, before politics, economics, and ideologies were globalized, the Catholic Church was global.

For more information on Caritas Internationalis, see <http://www.caritas.org>.