

Preparatory Meeting of the Congress on Africa

(November 2001)

On November 9th, through the initiative of the Pontifical Council "Cor Unum", a meeting was held in the Vatican of the Catholic agencies most responsible for programs of human promotion in Africa. The purpose of the meeting was to prepare a Congress on Africa and on the relationship between Evangelization and Charity. This is slated for 2003 and was proposed by numerous agencies, which participated in the Congress of Charity (Rome, May, 1999); it is also much awaited by the Bishops of the continent. The following groups were represented at the meeting: Missio Aachen, the Association of Volunteers for International Service (AVSI), Caritas Germany, Caritas Internationalis, Caritas Italy, Caritas Spain, Catholic Fund for Overseas Development (CAFOD-Caritas Great Britain), Catholic Relief Services (USA), Manos Unidas (Spain) and Secours Catholique (Caritas France). Caritas Poland sent a much appreciated written contribution, as it had not been able to assist to the meeting.

In the opening presentation, the President recalled the words of Cardinal Bernardin Gantin, the current Prefect of the Congregation for Bishops, from the recent Synod of Bishops on Africa. He underlined the necessity of dialogue between Catholic agencies and local Bishops, so as to identify together "the most pressing problems and solutions for rendering the most manifest and genuine presentation of Christ through Charity, which He has entrusted to our hands."

The presentations and the entire working day focused on identifying the challenges and priorities for the work of each agency in Africa, and proposed efficacious solutions for the greater harmonization of relationships between the agencies and the local Churches and to better build the relationship between evangelization and charity.

The central argument of the discussion was the role of "Cor Unum" on the platform of dialogue between the agencies and the Episcopal Conferences, as well as the need for a new model of development which takes greater account of the particular facets of Africa.

Among the major problems and challenges which face the agencies in providing aid to the African continent, there were: the question of peace, the lack of priority and minimum of planning on the part of those responsible at the local level, the absence of a well-formed laity and the scarcity of formation in general.

Among the proposed themes to be addressed in a Congress, the following were offered: the planning of development, the priority of formation, the reinforcement of structures within the local Church, the character of Christian witness in the presence and action of Catholic agencies, and the reinforcement of the tie between the Gospel and Charity.

As to the role of "Cor Unum" in this context, the participants encouraged a number of possibilities, among them: "Cor Unum" must be more visible and it must fulfill ever more frequently its function as a meeting place between the Bishops and the agencies (as expressed by pope Paul VI when he instituted the Dicastery); the clarification of the concepts of "agency", "organization", "humanitarian" and "aid". It was also suggested that another helpful opportunity for "Cor Unum" would be to give added notes on the philosophy of each agency, organization, or association included in the next edition of the *Catholic Aid Directory*.

Vatican City, November 10, 2001