



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 17th GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF CARITAS INTERNATIONALIS**

*To Archbishop Fouad El-Hage
President of Caritas Internationalis*

1. On the occasion of the 17th General Assembly of *Caritas Internationalis* being held in Rome, I would like to offer warm greetings to all the participants who represent the *Caritas* member organizations from around the world. Once again, I wish to express my gratitude to your organization for its active and competent application of the principle of charity and its generous work worldwide, especially in serving the poorest.
2. The theme you have chosen to develop during this assembly, "Globalizing solidarity", is a direct response to the appeal I launched in the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, calling for "a commitment to practical and concrete love for every human being" (n. 49), mindful that "now is the time for a new 'creativity' in charity, not only by ensuring that help is effective but also by 'getting close' to those who suffer, so that the hand that helps is seen not as a humiliating handout but as a sharing between brothers and sisters" (n. 50). I hope that through your exchanges and your work you will be able to find concrete ways of achieving this goal which is so dear to my heart.
3. It is an ambitious project as it aspires to take into account the urgent challenges posed by our world, which is marked by a multitude of exchanges that have created an expanding network of interdependence between systems, nations and people, but is also threatened by break-up, divisions and violent conflicts, as shown by the upsurge of terrorism. In this situation, there is undoubtedly no time to lose, and it is clear that it is no longer possible to draw up policies and programmes that are limited to dealing with only one aspect of a problem without consideration for other people.

Globalization has become an obligatory perspective for any policy, particularly regarding economics, and also the fields of aid and mutual international relief.

4. Indeed, if solidarity is to become worldwide, it must take into account all peoples from all regions of the world. This calls for a great deal more effort, and above all solid international guarantees with regard to humanitarian organizations which, against their wishes, are kept away from conflict zones because their safety is not guaranteed and the right to give assistance to people is no longer ensured.

Globalizing solidarity also means working in a close, steady relationship with international organizations, which are guarantors of rights, to create a new balance in the relations between rich and poor countries, so that one-way assistance - which all too often contributes to creating greater imbalances through a mechanism of permanent indebtedness - will cease. It is preferable to implement a true partnership based on equal and reciprocal relations, in recognition of the right of all people to have effective control over the choices that regard their future.

5. Moreover, the desire to globalize solidarity is not just a question of adapting to the new demands of the international situation or to changes in the application of market forces, but is above all a response to the urgent demands of Christ's Gospel. For us Christians, but also for the whole of humankind, this calls for a truly spiritual approach and a change of attitude and heart. If the aid offered to others should no longer be alms given by the rich to the poor, which is humiliating for the latter and perhaps a source of pride for the former, if it is to become sharing between partners - namely, recognition of true equality among us - we must "start afresh from Christ" (cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n. 29) and base our lives on the love of Christ, who made us his brothers and sisters. Like Peter the Apostle, we will understand from now on that "God does not show favouritism" (Acts 10: 34), and therefore the ministry of charity should be universal.

Welcoming all those who are in difficulty has long been the rule that governs your action in all the places and countries where *Caritas*, directly and indirectly, operates. It is now vital to strive to raise the awareness of all humankind to this task, so that each person, with the same dignity and the same rights as everyone else, may also expect the same assistance.

6. By inviting you to turn towards Christ, the Good Samaritan of our wounded humankind (cf. Lk 10: 30-36) without whom we can do nothing (cf. Jn 15: 5), I entrust you to the Virgin Mary, who at Cana already sought to perceive the expectations of humankind, so that she may accompany your work with her prayer. With all my heart I grant you a special Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 4 July 2003

JOHN PAUL II

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