



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE FEDERATION OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL CHRISTIAN ORGANIZATIONS
FOR INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTARY SERVICE (FOCSIV)**

Consistory Hall

Monday, 14 November 2022

[Multimedia]

Impromptu address

Prepared text

Impromptu address to representatives of FOCSIV

Thank you very much for this visit. Thank you very much for your words. This is the speech that I should read now, but it is better that you read it at home and that, at this time, I say something to you that comes from my heart, alright? I will give it to the President. She will be in charge of circulating it.

Volunteer work is one of the three things that I have found in Italy, that is a characteristic proper to you. I have not seen it like this elsewhere. The other things are parish oratories, especially in the north, and the associations for economic or banking aid, so that people can get a mortgage and go on — an economic type of help. Three typically Italian things.

I will begin with the first one: *volunteer work*. It is one of the most beautiful things because each person, with his or her own freedom, chooses to make this journey, which is an outward-bound journey, going out with an outstretched hand, a journey outwards to be concerned about others.

Action has to be taken. I could stay at home, seated, calm, watching television or doing other things ... No, I make this effort to go out. Volunteer work is the effort of going out to help others. It is like this. There is no desk volunteering and there is no television volunteer work. No. Volunteer work is always outward-bound, an open heart, an outstretched hand, the legs ready to go. Going out to encounter and going out to give. I would like to return to these two words.

Going forth to encounter. We are living in a civilization of clashes. Wars are a great clash and no one today doubts that we are experiencing a third world war: in one century, one clash after another, one after the other... And we never learn, on a global level but also on a personal level. How many times are decisions made on the basis of confrontation: “Who are you”? — “No, I don’t know who I am, but I am against this and against this”. One’s own identity is to be against, to clash. Instead, the path that you propose, that you live and that is a truly Christian proposal is the encounter to resolve, to heal the clash. We are living in the civilization of clashes. It is easier to say: “I am against this, against that, against that other one”, than to say “I am with”. This is a greater struggle for us. And you go out to meet people, to find men and women who need help, who need an outstretched hand, in order to journey together; with, not against.

This is your volunteer work and you do it without a salary. Yes, maybe they give you something for the bus, the ticket, but nothing more. Without a salary, not to earn a living but out of vocation. And it is an investment of your time that makes the lives of other people fruitful. Continue along this path of volunteering. It is part of the riches of your Italian culture.

If there are problems — there will always be problems, everywhere — problems should not be resolved like an ostrich does, by burying its head in the sand. Problems are solved by journeying, going, arguing ... Yes, quarrelling is good for you! Sometimes a good quarrel is good for you ... And understanding one another well, but as brothers and sisters, quarrelling like siblings. Good siblings know how to quarrel well. I remember once — a family thing — we are five [siblings] and my brother, the second one, got angry with the third one, both of them already married, adults, and they had it out with each other! I was there listening and I thought: “My God, these two are not mincing their words... “You did this... you are an idiot... you are this, the other.... Everything. Then they stopped. And my brother said, “I am leaving because I have things to do.... *Ciao bella!*”. A kiss and it was all over.

Siblings know how to argue but without getting to the point of destroying the essential which is their fraternal bond. We have to do this, seek the truth. There are different points of view, one argues, good, but this cannot be touched, this always remains, fraternity. And volunteer work is a hymn to fraternity. It is a hymn to going forward like this. This is why, continue to go forward like this, and to help in this way, to help by lending a hand to people.

This is what I wanted to tell you before giving you my blessing and saying goodbye. I am very happy about what you do. Continue, and may other people join you in doing this good work of

humanity. Thank you!

Prepared text that was consigned to those present

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

I am meeting you on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the founding of your Federation; you represent the 90 organizations it comprises, and which work in more than 80 countries throughout the world. I warmly greet you and thank your President for his kind words.

FOCSIV (Federation of Non-Governmental Christian Organizations for International Voluntary Service) offers a valuable contribution to the fight against every form of poverty and marginalization, to the protection of human dignity, to the affirmation of human rights and the promotion of growth in communities and local institutions; and it seeks to carry out all this in coherence with the Gospel and the social doctrine of the Church. Thank you for what you do, and for how you do it! You are a good sign of the Mother-Church that generates hope in a world inured to the outrages of hunger and wars. Your witness is a concrete response to those who no longer believe in a possible peace. Indeed, by your commitment you demonstrate that every small daily fragment can build the great mosaic of brotherhood.

We want a world of solidarity, where everyone feels welcome and is not forced to give up his or her dreams. This is not just a simple wish, but a very precise intent, which one of your mottos expresses as follows: "A world to be built together, respecting creation, in which each person can fulfil himself in full dignity!" It is a very timely message at this historic moment: the shadow of a third world war looms over the destiny of entire nations, with terrible consequences for people. I am thinking in particular of the elderly, women and children. What future are we building for the new generations? This is a question that should always accompany decisions at the international level. Today, therefore, taking up the cry of the many voiceless to whom your organizations are close, I would like to reflect with you on three objectives that concern everyone.

The first has to do with your being *volunteers in the world*. What does that mean today? I think it means being a decisive and courageous signal of openness, of availability towards one's neighbour, be they near or far. Because looking beyond borders becomes a predisposition of the heart to the encounter with one's "neighbour", a witness of love for humanity. Volunteer work is based on a deep-rooted attitude of solidarity, and we all know how much poverty, injustice and violence are present in every continent. Well, FOCSIV demonstrates that we can be "*fratelli tutti*" [all brothers and sisters], embracing every human being that the Lord places on the paths of our lives. Today "we have a great opportunity to express our innate sense of fraternity, to be Good Samaritans who bear the pain of other people's troubles rather than fomenting greater hatred and

resentment” (*Fratelli Tutti*, 77). In this way, Gospel teaching becomes daily life. And it is an invitation without exclusion; brothers and sisters all in humanity and love.

A second objective regards *peace*, which we see is wounded, trampled in Ukraine and in many other places on the planet. When peace is lacking, when the “reasons” of force prevail, people suffer, families are divided, and the most fragile end up alone. For months we have been seeing images of destruction, of death. Peace in justice is a necessary condition for a dignified life, for building together a better future. You, volunteers of FOCSIV, are called to nurture peace in your hearts and to share it with everyone you meet in your service. It is the most important gift you can take with you wherever you go, because “the world does not need empty words but convinced witnesses, peacemakers who are open to a dialogue that rejects exclusion or manipulation” (*Message for the 53rd World Day of Peace*, 1 January 2020).

Finally, the third objective is *development*. Every person, every people, needs the basic conditions for a dignified life; besides peace, shelter, healthcare, education, work, dialogue and mutual respect among cultures and faiths. Human promotion remains a commitment to which we must devote ourselves with willingness, vigour, creativity and the appropriate tools. Only an integral development — of the person and the context in which he or she lives — enables the unfolding of a good life, both personal and social, serene and open to the future. But let us think of how many young people today are forced to leave their homeland in search of a dignified existence; of how many men, women and children face inhuman journeys and violence of every type, in search of a better tomorrow; of how many continue to die on the routes of desperation, while others discuss their destiny or turn away! Forced migrations — to flee from wars, hunger, persecution or climate changes — are one of the great evils of this age, which we will only be able to tackle at its root by ensuring real development in every country. And you, volunteers of FOCSIV, are also committed to this.

Dear friends, in these 50 years you have been weavers of peace and artisans of charity and development. I encourage you to continue, on the paths of the world, taking care of your brothers and sisters, like the good Samaritan did, aware that “we cannot be indifferent to suffering; we cannot allow anyone to go through life as an outcast” (*Fratelli tutti*, 68). Do not let yourselves be discouraged by difficulties or by disappointments, but trust in the Lord, who is both rock and tenderness. I entrust each of you and all the members of your organizations to the protection of the Virgin Mary. With all my heart, I bless you. And I ask you to please pray for me. Thank you!

