

Change for Children, Children for Change

International Conference on Child Rights

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Address of Mr. Stefano NOBILE, Advocacy Officer, Caritas Internationalis

Honorable Minister,
Dear Fr Frederick,
Dear friends,

Good morning!

And thank you. Thank you for being here. Thank you for your commitment to make this world a better world for all children but, most particularly, for those most in need, for those who live in vulnerable situations, for those who are exploited, for those who are in poverty, for those who cannot live their lives as “children”.

On Friday, 25 September 2015, in the General Assembly Hall of the United Nations (UN) headquarters in New York, United States of America, high-level representatives and dignitaries of 193 States adopted the text of the Resolution *Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.

The 2030 Agenda was the result of the convergence of two, up to that time, separated processes: the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) track, and the Sustainable Development track. Over the last two years, the inputs from both of these tracks were synthesized in the context of the Post-2015 process to form a single, universal, and comprehensive development agenda which integrates, in a balanced way, five components of sustainable development, the so-called “5 Ps”: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership.

The 2030 Agenda includes a Declaration, 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and 169 targets, as well as components on means of implementation, global partnership, follow-up and review process. Among the six principles inspiring the Agenda, I would like to briefly dwell on two: “Leaving No One Behind” and the so-called “Human Rights-Based Approach”.

The Sustainable Development Goals place the principles of equality and non-discrimination at the heart of the new Agenda, aiming to ensure the inclusion of marginalized, disempowered, and excluded groups, and calling for reaching the furthest first. The other side of this coin is the so-called Human Rights-based approach, which provides an overall framework for what the governments aspire to achieve for their people. To make sure that every person enjoys the full spectrum of Human Rights, governments agreed on mainstreaming the no-one-left-behind approach in policies, service delivery and monitoring of outcomes, as well as updating normative frameworks where they fail to uphold the principles of equality and zero discrimination.

As previously said, the 2030 Agenda includes a Declaration, 17 Sustainable Development Goals, and 169 targets. But what about its vision for making this world a better world for children?

According to the Agenda, States should “*envisage a world of universal respect for human rights and human dignity, the rule of law, justice, equality and non-discrimination; of respect for race, ethnicity and cultural diversity; and of equal opportunity permitting the full realization of human potential and contributing to shared prosperity. A world which invests in its children and in which every child grows up free from violence and exploitation. A world in which every woman*

and girl enjoys full gender equality and all legal, social and economic barriers to their empowerment have been removed. A just, equitable, tolerant, open and socially inclusive world in which the needs of the most vulnerable are met”¹. And in fact, the new goals and targets capture issues that are crucially related to children’s rights. The Sustainable Development Goals address aspects such as health (SDG 3), education (SDG 4), equal job opportunities (SDG 8), equality between boys and girls (SDG 5) as well as violence against children (SDG 16.2). Moreover, combating child poverty and reducing inequality are both recognized and will have to be addressed in the implementation strategies towards 2030².

But...

On the morning of that same day, Friday, 25 September 2015, Pope Francis, standing before the same high-level representatives and dignitaries, as well as officers of various Non-Governmental Organizations, and a good number of journalists accredited to the UN, after few seconds of meditation said *“The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the World Summit, which opens today, is an important sign of hope”*. However, *“solemn commitments are not enough, although they are certainly a necessary step toward solutions. [...] Our world demands of all government leaders a will which is effective, practical and constant, concrete steps and immediate measures for preserving and improving the natural environment and thus putting an end as quickly as possible to the phenomenon of social and economic exclusion”*. In order to respond to this demand, *“we need to ensure that our institutions are truly effective in the struggle against all these scourges [never forgetting] that political and economic activity is only effective when it is understood as a prudential activity, guided by a perennial concept of justice and constantly conscious of the fact that [...] we are dealing with real men and women who live, struggle and suffer, and are often forced to live in great poverty, deprived of all rights. To enable these real men and women to escape from extreme poverty, we must allow them to be dignified agents of their own destiny”*.

The speech of the Holy Father received a standing ovation of long duration, giving the impression that the audience fully agreed with Pope Francis’ clear and convincing rationale. But what about the next steps? Is the promise *“to free the human race from the tyranny of poverty and want and to heal and secure our planet”* enough?

In order to enhance the vision of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the real needs of real people must constantly and forcefully be brought to the national, regional and global decision-making arenas. In other words, constant and strong advocacy in favour of the most in need is required, at all levels. Advocating in favour of the most in need requires both words and actions aimed at contributing to the elimination of the root causes that create those needs: if we teach a man to fish, but the river has no fish in it, his family, his children and his community will still suffer from hunger. The role of the international community through plans such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the role of Non-Governmental Organizations – such as Caritas Internationalis – through their daily work at the very grass-root level is exactly to find joint solutions to the suffering of men, women and children, most especially of the most disadvantaged.

The heart of Caritas Internationalis, which is at the center of the Catholic Church in relation to its teaching in the area of charity work, throbs to serve those who live in the most resource-limited settings, both in developing and developed countries. Caritas Internationalis finds its very reason for existence in the service rendered by hundreds of thousands of professionals and volunteers who, in 200 countries and territories of the world, day by day and night by night, help its diocesan and national members, and their diocesan affiliates, to distribute life-saving commodities among millions of people in need, being with them and for them in every circumstance – not only during emergencies or crises, but also before and after.

¹ *Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, United Nations, 25 September 2015.

² *Assessing Sustainable Development Goals from the Standpoint of Equity for Children*, Alberto Minujin, Mildred Ferrer, 13 July 2016.

However, these daily actions will never suffice if they do not inspire – and, consequently, are not complemented by – broader and targeted global efforts aimed at eliminating the root causes that make people vulnerable, facilitating access to Integral Human Development for all. And this is the reason why a “second arm” of Caritas Internationalis has been established through its delegations to the United Nations and other multi-lateral organizations based in New York, USA; Rome, Italy; and Geneva, Switzerland.

On paper, the role of these delegations is quite simple: to bring the voice of those in need in order to influence the global decision-making process so that just solutions could be found for protecting and promoting their dignity as human beings. However, in order to fully accomplish this role, strong involvement of national and diocesan Caritas members – as well of the local Church – is required. In fact, the “second arm”, which acts the global level, can fully accomplish its job only if it coordinates with the “first arm”, that is, the local level. In turn, the “first arm” should make every possible effort to help the “second arm” by shedding light on the daily battle waged by millions of people, worldwide, in order to survive.

“Whatever we do, we must always remember the people”, said Dr. Margaret Chan, Director-General of World Health Organization at the 68th World Health Assembly. *“Remember the people”* must also be the refrain sung by the 193 Members States of the United Nations all along their journey to reach the goals set up in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The melody of such a refrain will be given voice by those who cannot wait until 2030 to have their lives improved, especially our future: our children.

I thank you for your attention.