

## **Caritas Internationalis**

Satellite Symposium “The Role of POC for EID Testing and Improved Treatment Options Towards Ending Paediatric AIDS”

Satellite Symposium at ICASA 2017

Friday, 8 December 2017 – 18.30-20.30  
Prof. Souleyman Mboup (Cinema Majestic) room  
Sofitel Abidjan Hotel Ivoire

## **Address of Mr. Stefano NOBILE**

### **Focal Point for Health and HIV, Caritas Internationalis**

Good evening!

First and foremost, I would like to thank the co-organisers of this important Symposium to give space to a Faith-Based Organisation, Caritas Internationalis. Caritas is a global Confederation of 165 national members spread in 200 States and territories of the world. As essential participants in the social and pastoral mission of the Catholic Church, a significant number of our member organizations, at all levels (global, regional, national, diocesan and parish) are engaged in the delivery of health care to all in need, but particularly to those who are poor, marginalized, migrants or otherwise deprived of access to such vital care.

I would like to begin my brief intervention with a quote: *“I sincerely hope that this dialogue will not come to an end after this brief session; let it continue until we find the will, the technical expertise, the resources and the methods that provide access to diagnosis and treatment available to all, and not simply to a privileged few, for there is not human life that is more sacred than another, as there is not human life that is qualitatively more significant than another”*.

While I fully agree with the concept expressed here, I have to admit that these heart-taking words are not mine. They were addressed by His Holiness Pope Francis to the participants in the first High Level Dialogue among Leaders of Pharmaceutical and Diagnostic Equipment Industries that Caritas Internationalis, in collaboration with UNAIDS and PEPFAR, organised in April 2016.

In fact, Pope Francis, in his Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*, has made a powerful call to the world: he appeals *“for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet”* – calling for a paradigm shift, which includes new conversations, new ways of working, *“a new and universal solidarity”* and commitment to doing things differently to save our common home and to uphold and respect the God-given dignity of all people.

And Caritas Internationalis, as organisation of the Catholic Church, cannot take a step back.

For this reason, we decided to begin a discussion with pharmaceutical, diagnostic and equipment companies aimed at exploring how they can play a critical role through innovation and collaboration in the development and delivery of medicines for AIDS, in particular affordable, accessible, and acceptable long-term ARV treatment, including “child-friendly” formulations and dosages, as well as diagnostic and monitoring tools for use in low- and middle-income countries where access to newer technologies is scarce.

But, as you can imagine, a dialogue of this type, with multiple and different stakeholders involved, needs time to be consolidated and be effective. For this reason, Caritas Internationalis, under the leadership of the Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development led by His Eminence Cardinal Peter Turkson, and in collaboration

with UNAIDS, PEPFAR, WHO, the World Council of Churches – Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance and Elisabeth Glaser Paediatric AIDS Foundation, called for a second dialogue aimed to assess efforts to eliminate HIV among children and adolescent and, most importantly, to formulate an action-oriented road map to address ongoing challenges and intensify efforts to achieve the elimination of HIV among children and adolescents.

On 17 November this year, the Action Plan was endorsed by all the stakeholders involved in this second Dialogue. They agreed to specific and action-oriented good faith commitments to focus, accelerate and collaborate on the development, registration, introduction, and roll-out of the most optimal paediatric formulations and diagnostics. The Action Plan was released on World AIDS Day – few days ago, and it is available on the website of Elisabeth Glaser Paediatric AIDS Foundation.

However, these broader and targeted global efforts aimed at eliminating the root causes that make people vulnerable, in particular children and adolescents, while of paramount importance, will never suffice without daily actions that always remember the people.

The heart of Caritas Internationalis throbs for serving 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, day by day and night by night, help diocesan and national members to distributing life-saving commodities among millions of people in need, being with them and for them in every circumstance – not only during emergencies or crisis, but also before and after.

And I want to conclude my speech by giving an example of this important pillar of the service rendered by the Confederation of Caritas Internationalis.

In 2015, UNAIDS and PEPFAR launched a two-year initiative aimed at strengthening the capacity of faith-based leaders and organisations to advocate for and deliver a sustainable HIV response – the so-called FBO Initiative. Caritas Internationalis is one of the proud organisations actively involved, and we are in the process of beginning the so-called “Phase II”, which responds to the call of Pope Francis to do things differently.

In particular, Caritas Internationalis is working with Caritas Nigeria and UNAIDS Nigeria to support nationally-based activities aimed at strengthening capacity-building interventions for Catholic Church-related health facilities and other FBOs, as well as reinforcing the capacity of national partners to deliver appropriate and scientific-based messaging on paediatric HIV.

The implementation logic of this project depends on priests and religious leaders of Catholic Church communities who, after being trained on pastoral and scientific considerations in HIV pathology, can deliver audience-appropriate HIV/AIDS prevention and stigma reduction messaging on paediatric HIV to their congregations. In addition, such “activated” clergy will serve as a bridge between identified health centres and their congregations by leading a team of Church Health Advisor who will target high-risk mother and child pairs by tracking immunization status as well as recurrence of

symptoms of communicable diseases; and providing or referring for HIV testing and counselling and ART initiative where indicated.

The objective is to reduce the paediatric HIV treatment gap in three selected areas of Nigeria by 10% by the end of 2018.

Furthermore, our intention is to export this good practice in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and, eventually, in India, adapting the project to specific national contexts.

However, we cannot do it alone – we need commitment and support of all stakeholders, since interactive dialogue and joint actions are, in the words of Pope Francis *“the only way to confront the problems of our world and to seek solutions that are truly effective. [...] A genuine cooperation between politics, science and business can achieve significant results”*<sup>1</sup>.

I thank you for your attention and I wish you all a great evening!

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<sup>1</sup> Address of His Holiness Pope Francis – Visit to the United Nations Office at Nairobi,  
[http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/november/documents/papa-francesco\\_20151126\\_kenya-unon.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/november/documents/papa-francesco_20151126_kenya-unon.html)