

# **Combating the Emergence and Spread of Antimicrobial Resistance: A Workshop to Strengthen Faith-Based Engagement**

12-15 December 2016 – Rome, Italy

Mr. Stefano Nobile, Caritas Internationalis Advocacy Officer

Your Eminence, Excellences, dear friends, and colleagues,

Good afternoon!

First and foremost, I want to convey the warmest regards of Michel Roy, Secretary General of Caritas Internationalis, who gave me the honor to address few words of welcome on behalf of the Caritas Confederation.

As you know, Caritas Internationalis, which is at the center of the Catholic Church in relation to its teaching in the area of charity work, finds its very reason for existence in the service rendered by hundreds of thousands of professionals and volunteers in 200 countries and territories of the world. They help national and diocesan Caritas organizations; they accompany the most marginalized and vulnerable people in every circumstance of life.

They also strive to eliminate the root causes that make people vulnerable, which requires clear and joint commitments; these include, for example, distribution of enough and nutritious food to eat, assurance of decent work to provide financial support to one's own family and others in their local communities, offering decent housing to provide a roof over their heads, provision of good-quality education so that they may become active and productive members of society, and provision of accessible and good-quality health care services.

Infectious diseases have caused human suffering, illness and death since Biblical times, and before. Today, the threats posed by infectious diseases are today being amplified by social, economic and environmental factors that accelerate the natural phenomena that modify infectious disease patterns. As a result of inequitable distribution of the vaccines, medicines and goods available now to prevent, treat and control infectious diseases, coupled with weak public health delivery systems in developing and low income countries, a disproportionate burden of human suffering and death from infectious diseases will continue to occur<sup>1</sup>.

The experts tell us that antimicrobial resistance occurs naturally over time, usually through genetic changes. However, the misuse and overuse of antimicrobials is accelerating this process. In many places, antibiotics are overused and misused in people

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<sup>1</sup> David L. Heymann, Effects of Social, Environmental and Economic Factors on Current and Future Patterns of Infectious Diseases, Vatican City, 2006.

and animals, and often given without professional oversight<sup>2</sup>. As Dr. Margaret Chan, Director General of the World Health Organization, summarized in September 2016, *“antimicrobial resistance poses a fundamental threat to human health, development, and security”*.

But, as Pope Francis affirmed in his very recent address to the members of the Representative Council and personnel of Caritas Internationalis, *“poverty, hunger, diseases and oppression are not inevitable; they cannot represent permanent situations. With trust in the power of the Gospel, we can make a real contribution to changing things, or at least to making them better. We can uphold the dignity of all those who await a sign of our love”*.

For these reasons, Caritas Internationalis is pleased to co-host this workshop, which is *“the first holistic and systematic assessment by faith-based communities on how to strengthen their medical, social, education and pastoral structure to combat the emergence and spread of antimicrobial resistance and address individual and community needs associated with drug-resistant disease”*.

In fact, this workshop is another step that strives toward *“rejecting everything that demeans human beings”*.

*“Continue to show signs of hospitality and solidarity, great and small”*, urged Pope Francis to Caritas Internationalis. Today, this request is not addressed to Caritas Internationalis only, but to all those gathered here to address this significant threat to individual and community well-being.

I thank you for your attention.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2016/commitment-antimicrobial-resistance/en/>