

Conference on “Ethical Quality of Humanitarian Aid”  
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**The special responsibility for and tasks of the churches in Humanitarian Aid**

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Firstly, may I, on behalf of the 162 member organisations of Caritas Internationalis throughout the world congratulate Diakonie Emergency Aid on its fiftieth anniversary. Anniversaries are sacred spaces where we can contemplate the past. Celebrate the achievements of the present and plan for the future and it seems to me in your conference today you have attained the right mixture. I am delighted to be able to be with you to wish you ‘happy birthday’.

I would like to begin by broadening out slightly the remit given to me by saying a word about humanitarianism in general to put our work in a global context. It is no exaggeration to say that humanitarianism is in crisis. The normal altruistic assisting of people in need from a neutral and impartial stance and being welcomed by all for this work is going through a ‘dark night of the soul’ because of the current geo-political landscape. On the one hand, many Western military powers in the ‘war on terrorism’ see humanitarian help as an essential tool in winning the hearts and minds campaign – and that includes cooption of humanitarian organisations – even going to the extent of integrating political and humanitarian considerations into a standard template. A consequence of that is that even NGOs opposed to Western foreign policies that result in, for example, the occupation of the Iraq, are regarded as tools of those powers and Western interests and values and therefore targeted, as we have seen tragically time and time again, most recently in the case of the two Simonas of an Italian NGO, ‘Un ponte per Baghdad’.

As a recent study at Tufts University in the USA stated<sup>1</sup>, we have moved from a post World War II multilateral stance to a unilateral set of positions driven by national security, political and business interests. The core humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence have been eroded. We see something of the direction of Pax Americana in looking at where their and their allies’ aid monies go to. Bosnia receives \$ 116 per person in bilateral aid while Ethiopia receives \$ 2. In 2003, Iraq received \$ 74 per person and Congo, where 2.5 million people have died from want, it’s \$17. There has also been a shift in government money from development to humanitarian aid – from 2.5% of aid budgets in 1980 to 11.3% in 1999. In other words, the criterion is not need but politics, not capacity building of people in need but provision of emergency materials in order to control. And many humanitarian organisations, believing they must be present in every crisis for their own institutional survival and to follow the euro, are sucked into a system that ironically endangers not only their principles but their work and staff. As the Tufts Report again states, the severity of human need in Iraq paled in comparison to elsewhere but hundreds of NGOs flew in after the Coalition troops had occupied the country. Another issue is the environment in which we in Caritas and Diakonie now work. We operate increasingly not in the normal humanitarian theatre of natural catastrophes but in situations of conflict fabricated by human beings. The difference with most conflicts nowadays is not

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<sup>1</sup> The Future of Humanitarian Action: Implications of Iraq and Other Recent Crisis, Feinstein International Famine Center, Tufts University, January 2004

only that the majority of victims are civilians but that two-thirds of the conflicts on our planet are caused by identity rather than territorial ambition. As one writer notes, "In this decade, the balance of violence has shifted from war 'outside', in the anarchic space between nation states, to war 'inside', between the embodiments of difference in civil society"<sup>2</sup>. That, too, has had significant effects on our work, forcing us to think about matters from how we cooperate with armed forces to how we improve the security of our workers.

Let me suggest a few ways forward out of this humanitarian mess that do not depend on regime change in Washington in November and are particularly applicable to those of us from the Judaeo-Christian tradition. The first is to reject being instrumentalised by the military of governments. In Caritas, we held an international seminar last year to come up with guidelines of working with the military for individual members or for when we operate as a Confederation as in Afghanistan. Those guidelines which will be discussed by our Executive Committee in November make it clear that we will neither be coopted nor instrumentalised by armies who have a totally distinct function from humanitarians. Blurring the lines results in confusion, puts aid workers at risk and does not benefit those in need. We need to dialogue with our governments, UN and NATO and this too is being done.

The second imperative is to regard peace-making and building and reconciliation work as integral to emergency and development work. By 2007, we will have held training for trainer sessions for 4,000 people throughout the world involved in Caritas or Justice and Peace Commissions. We hope to view all our work in future through a lens of peace-building which tries to ensure stable communities where differences are addressed and through reconciliation which takes former enemies to a 'new place' where they can construct a new relationship and through that a new community and society based on justice, forgiveness and truth.

The third imperative is to be much more involved with advocacy work with supporters at home and with Government to persuade them that aid should be provided on the criterion of need and to separate humanitarian principles from political or security interests. With the monies collected for Kosovo because Western politicians were afraid either of too many migrants or war spreading too near them, we could practically have given each family a Mercedes Benz. Yet in Guinea, where war put a third of the population on the move and thousands starved, we had difficulties in getting any funds because neither the medias nor government was interested. Our members in Germany and elsewhere must find new ways of interesting the public in the 'forgotten emergencies', challenging governments for following their own (often misguided) security priorities rather helping those in genuine need and not following the media bandwagon all the time. I said earlier that there is only one superpower left but that is not entirely true. The other superpower is public opinion and it should be led by civil society and especially the churches. We should form our own 'coalition of the willing' to confront those who wish to devalue humanitarian principles.

A fourth imperative for Christian-inspired agencies is to separate entirely proselytism from humanitarian aid. Those self-styled Christian agencies who mix the two are playing a dangerous game, particularly in today's global climate. We do what we do because we are Christian not because we want to make others like us.

A fifth imperative is to remember that the future is global and therefore the Christian agencies have to be organised at the global level. Caritas Internationalis is a global network but I doubt whether many of our members would put the global structure at the same level of importance as the local. Yet in an age of globalisation where decisions affecting the housewife standing at a bus stop in Stuttgart or Harare are made in New York or London, we have to put well

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<sup>2</sup> Susanne Hoerber Rudolph quoted in Robert Schreiter: The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality and Strategies (1998), Orbis Books

organised and well resourced at the international level in order to struggle for pro-poor policies.

And then there is the question of power. It used to be the norm to assist partners or, in our case, members in Africa and elsewhere with 'capacity building' to improve their professionalism. In the case of Caritas, most donor members did not open offices parallel to the local Caritas structure. That is now being undermined by individual government and EU policies demanding that European NGOs set up offices in, say, Africa if they want to qualify for funds. Caritas as a Confederation has guidelines for partnership principles and a handbook on best practices so that all benefit and the weak become stronger. Such policies destroy such principles. This new imperialism in aid is disastrous for all of us. It is essentially racist in saying we need a white face to look at this project and ensure the money is safe. We from the churches must oppose such policies or try to find creative ways of coming up with strategies that give power to our local members and ultimately to the poor themselves. Otherwise, we are betraying the very principles we stand for. The churches should stand for truth in a society where manipulation of it is becoming the norm.

Lastly, the question of Islam. It is tragic that mishandling through ignorance of the 'War on Terror' is being regarded as a 'War on Islam'. At our General Assembly last year, the members of Caritas Internationalis said a major priority had to be a dialogue with other faiths. We have begun a dialogue with Islamic Relief which, though born in England, has an international network, and with our own Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue in the Vatican. Islamic Relief had both the American and British Secret Services in their offices for months and now have government and even EU approval. We have to take our dialogue into the Moslem world, understanding it and other faiths better, cooperating with them wherever possible and incorporating their humanitarian ideas into a more universal global consensus.

And we do that frankly if we too are people of faith and not just technicians. Archbishop Diarmuid Martin of Dublin at our General Assembly last year said that we Christians should judge society on three theological principles – the option for the poor, whether society is helping them to get out of poverty; the unity of the human family, whether we are uniting people or dividing them; and the universal destination of the Earth's goods, whether the goods of the Earth are shared by all. Global society fails on all three criteria with poverty on the increase – in Africa 35% of the continent's children are at a higher risk of death than they were ten years ago; the unity of the human family has been shattered by ethnic, religious and racial division, fuelled by a doctrine of greed by some of the powerful of the world that has made our planet very unsafe; and the goods of the Earth are manifestly not being equitably shared with 60% of the world's population living on 5.6% of its wealth.

These are some of the principles by which we should stand and my fear is that they are being sidelined as incomes of Western NGOs go down, resulting in job losses at home, and as competition increases with the more business-oriented NGOs winning hands down on the money front. But we have something else to give – something that comes from the life and praxis of Christ himself which is solidarity. The great South African Dominican, Albert Nolan, said that solidarity was when there was no longer a 'you' nor a 'me' but only 'us'. Pope John Paul II has said that solidarity is not a vague feeling of sympathy but a gut-wrenching compassion for others. The world of emergency aid should know us by that passion, by that solidarity, by that commitment. In Bam in Iran, one of the Caritas workers who is Catholic was asked by one of the earthquake victims for a Bible. "I can't give you one" she said "but why do you want one anyway?" The old lady replied: "I want to see what makes you treat us with such respect and love"- Making the world more human is the criterion on which all our work must be judged.