

Statement by Monsignor Robert J. Vitillo
Head of Caritas Internationalis Delegation to the UN in Geneva
At the Launch of the Inter-Agency Central African Republic Regional
Refugee Response Plan for 2015
Palais des Nations, 23 January 2015

As a global confederation of 164 national member organizations of Catholic Church-related humanitarian assistance, health, social service and development organizations operating in some 200 countries and territories in the world, Caritas Internationalis is very grateful for the invitation to present an NGO perspective in this panel of such eminent experts and representatives of intergovernmental organizations, all committed to implement the Central African Republic Regional Refugee Response Plan for the current year 2015. The statistics and the resources requested are well detailed in the plan and they give ample witness to the gravity of this crisis which cumulatively affects almost one million people both inside the Central African Republic and in its neighbouring countries.

However, we also should take a few moments to reflect on the human persons who live out this tragedy on a daily basis. The dramatic impact on individuals, families, and communities has been compellingly described by those directly accompanying victims and survivors of the violence, trauma, fear, injury and loss. Leadership and staff of Caritas Chad, when launching an Emergency Appeal to Caritas Internationalis during 2014, reported: “Having been completely abandoned, the Chadians returning from the Central African Republic and the CAR refugees have need of every help in order to survive and to achieve their human dignity.” The principal religious leaders of the Central African Republic, representing the Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim faith traditions, have jointly and compellingly witnessed to unimaginable suffering to which their compatriots have subjected. In September 2014, subsequent to a visit to a ravaged village outside the capital, the Catholic Archbishop of Bangui expressed outrage “to see human beings reduced to the state of animals because they have been wandering in the forest for two months with no assistance, no one intervenes to their aid, leaving these people to die.” He has since received death threats for such statements and has declared himself ready to “die for his flock”. This interfaith solidarity and leadership attests to the fact that the conflict in CAR is not a religious war, as has been mistakenly claimed by many in the media and even by some UN officials.

Since I was requested to offer a perspective of non-governmental organizations, I have calculated the cumulative requests made by NGOs

for resources to support their respective contributions to the realization of the Regional Response Plan. These amount to approximately \$ 14.5 million USD, out of a cumulative total of more than \$331 million USD. Since we can be sure that NGO activities are present in most, if not all, of the sectors for which resources are requested, we might request more focused consideration, during future planning activities of this type, of the burden of assistance shouldered by NGOs and attempt to evaluate whether these organizations receive an equitable share of the resources made available in response to such emergency situations. We note, as well, the poor representation of indigenous organizations among the requests for support. Most likely, this situation is caused by difficulties experienced by such smaller organizations to gain access to cluster planning mechanisms and because of the complex processes inherent in applying for multi-lateral funding.

I now will speak briefly about the responses and the perspectives of which my organization is most familiar, those of diocesan and national Caritas structures in Cameroon, Chad, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, and of Catholic Relief Services, which is one of the Caritas members from the United States of America that is serving in the affected region. We are pleased to note that two of these Caritas members have been included in the Regional Response Plan, and we sincerely hope that the plan will receive sufficient funding to address the needs articulated by our members and the other applicant NGOs and by the intergovernmental organizations represented here today. Caritas programmes in the receiving countries include cash transfer, capacity building, education for children, support and supplies for agriculture, and food assistance. To take the specific example of Caritas Democratic Republic of Congo, the organization has requested support in the plan being presented today; such funding will facilitate their programmes to provide food and non-food items to 8000 families and to offer health services to 4000 families in several localities in the Northwest of DRC.

In addition to resources obtained through cooperative agreements with intergovernmental agencies, these Caritas organizations also have relied on bilateral and confederation-wide support from other Caritas member organizations. In the case of Caritas Chad, we launched an emergency appeal for its response to returning Chadians and Central African Republic refugees. Once again to take the example of Caritas DRC, the organization receives support from the German government, through Caritas Germany, to provide non-food items, education, WASH, and protection to 5000 families in Camp Inke.

The low level of funding made available through the multi-lateral system during 2014 left many humanitarian needs uncovered. If more funding is not made available during this current year, NGOs on the ground in the receiving countries most likely will not be able to meet the basic needs of the refugees and, even less so, will they be able to facilitate integral human development among these people.

While we understand that this Regional Plan is focused on those citizens of the Central African Republic who have sought asylum and protection in neighbouring countries and have been accorded refugee status, we feel the need, as well, especially in the context of this joint agency event, to raise attention once again to the desperate situation of Internally Displaced persons inside CAR itself. During the past two years, the national Caritas there, as well as its diocesan affiliates, provided shelter to more than 80,000 people who sought refuge in Catholic churches, schools, missions, and seminaries; some still remain in these buildings due to continuing danger in their local communities. Others have been assisted to return to their respective communities and received help in reconstructing their homes. Thousands of displaced persons have received hygiene kits and other supplies to address basic needs, seeds and other agricultural supplies, medical supplies for health stations, and peace-building and social cohesion education. The severe challenge of providing emergency service, as well as the pillage of Church assets in CAR, has put an enormous strain on Caritas and other religious structures in the country. It is vital to ensure adequate attention to needs of Internally Displaced Persons in CAR, also with a view toward accompanying them as they struggle to achieve their God-given human dignity and to remain in their homeland.

Pope Francis frequently has appealed to the international community to urgently scale up the response to those affected by the conflicts in the Central African Republic. On 12 January 2015, during his address to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, he said, "I think of the dramatic situation in the Central African Republic, in which, sad to say, the good will inspiring the efforts of those seeking to build a future of peace, security and prosperity, has encountered resistance and selfish partisan interests. These risk frustrating the hopes of a people which has endured so much and which now longs to shape its future in freedom." On his return trip from Asia this week, he announced his own plans to visit the Central African Republic before the end of 2015.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.