

Conférence Régionale 15.5.2009 à Bruxelles

Dear friends,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to this Regional Conference. Even though we call these conferences - taking place in odd years - small conferences, our today's Regional Conference has, apart from the statutory requirements, three important issues on its agenda.

We are going to change our statutes, introducing internal rules as well as common management standards. Personally I am very grateful to all the Member Organisations which made the decision to be with us today. I am aware that this is a burden to you personally, to stay one day more in Brussels as it is a financial burden. I am happy to announce that we are more than two third of the Member Organisations present or represented so we are able to make those important changes according to Belgian law and according to our statutes.

Un deuxième point d'une importance majeur sont les principes communs de bonne gestion. En effet un groupe de travail s'est penché pendant des mois et des années sur cette question délicate. Après de longues concertations et discussions en interne nous sommes aujourd'hui en mesure de vous présenter un texte qui devrait aider les Caritas en Europe dans leur cheminement sur la voie de l'excellence. Caritas en effet ne peut comme une organisation professionnelle exiger moins de ses membres à cause des personnes bénéficiaires qui ont droit d'être accueillis selon des standards de qualité de haut niveau qui doivent aller de paire avec une formation des cœurs chez tous les intervenants. Si nous adoptons ce texte aujourd'hui comme Caritas Europa, il prendra la forme d'une proposition aux Organisations Membres. Il ne sera contraignant que pour celui qui ratifiera ce texte par ses organes de gouvernance compétents.

Die dritte große Herausforderung ist die Gestaltung unserer eigenen Zukunft als Caritas Europa. Diese liegt immer in den Händen von Personen. Die Mandate unseres Generalsekretärs, unseres Vorstandes und mein eigenes Mandat laufen mit der Generalversammlung der Caritas Internationalis in Rom im Jahre 2011 aus. Vor diesem Termin werden wir uns als Regionalkonferenz nur noch ein einziges Mal treffen und zwar nächstes Jahr Anfang Juni in El Escorial in Spanien. Traditionsgemäß finden diese Wahlen 1 Jahr vor dem Ablauf der Mandate statt, um somit Übergänge, Kontinuitäten und Diskontinuitäten besser gestalten zu können. Der Vorstand wird sie über das beschlossene Vorgehen informieren und sie bitten, sich auch in Zukunft aktiv um das Weiterbestehen der Caritas Europa zu bemühen.

Dear friends, we are meeting during a time politicians and economists are calling „crisis“. As Caritas we know those crises are the daily bread of a lot of people in need all over the place. People in Armenia or in Albania are living in such a crisis situation of poverty since more than twenty years. Homeless people in France, street children in Romania, elderly people in Georgia are

experiencing financial and economical constraints since years and decades. Caritas organisations are experts in crisis management. One could even say that crisis management is the *raison d'être* of Caritas. As crisis manager we know that one crisis can hide another one. Today everybody agrees to say that the financial crisis was hiding an economic crisis. Behind the economic and financial crisis a crisis of values and societies is emerging.

As we are all aware the crisis of today does not hit only people but also whole institutions. And we know that Caritas organisations are hit or will be hit by the crisis. Financial constraints are on the agenda of many Caritas organisations. Cuts in domestic and in international budgets were necessary in some countries. Those cuts will affect Caritas Europa as well. We have to talk about our own international solidarity mechanisms. The board proposes to open the discussion about membership fees. The actual key seems no longer sustainable. Solidarity in times of crises has to fit to reality and cannot only be achieved by growth. In Europe the limits of growth are visible and tangible. Our secretarial structures in Rome and in Brussels have to respond to the needs of Member Organisations so that they can fulfil their main task: serving the poor.

As Christians we know and we believe that crisis or sufferings are not the last word in history. Easter tells us a different story. It is our duty and our privilege to incarnate the hope of Easter in today's time. Let us put our gathering, our discussions and deliberations under the spirit of Jesus who opened new perspectives for the Reign of God in our midst.

Erny Gillen
May 2009