



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE FEDERATION OF CHRISTIAN ORGANIZATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEER
SERVICE (FOCSIV)**

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Thursday, 4 December 2014*

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good Morning!

I am pleased to meet with you on the occasion of International Volunteer Day. I address my cordial greeting and I thank the President, who presented your mission in the current situation. Your Federation, which gathers Christian-based Volunteer Organizations, performs precious action in the world. It is the image of a Church that rolls up her sleeves and serves brothers and sisters in difficulty. Indeed, the various organizations that compose the focsiv seek to combine the experiential wisdom of their members with the aspect of volunteer service to the poor in the manner of the Good Samaritan and in line with Gospel values. Starting with your Christian identity, you present yourselves as “volunteers in the world” with numerous development initiatives, in order to give a practical response to the aspersions of hunger and war.

I thank you for what you do and how you do it! Your interventions alongside men and women in difficulty are a vivid proclamation of the tenderness of Christ, who walks with the humanity of all times. Follow this path of voluntary and unselfish commitment. There is so much need of the value of gratuitousness: the poor can never become an opportunity for profit! Poverty today has had a makeover — there are new kinds of poverty! — and among the poor different expectations are growing: they aspire to be leaders, they organize themselves, and most of all they practice the solidarity that exists among the suffering, among the least. You have been called to read these signs of the times and to become an instrument which serves to draw attention to the poor. Solidarity with the poor is thinking and acting in terms of community, of the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by the few. It is also fighting the structural causes of poverty: inequality, unemployment and homelessness, the denial of social and labour rights. Solidarity is a way of making history with the poor, avoiding the allegedly altruistic works that reduce the other to

indifference.

Among the principal causes of poverty is an economic system which plunders nature — I am thinking of deforestation in particular, but also of environmental disasters and the loss of biodiversity. It bears repeating that Creation is not a possession that we can dispose of as we please, much less a possession of only a few. Creation is a magnificent gift that God has given us to care for and use to the benefit of all, with respect. I encourage you, therefore, to carry on in your commitment in order so that Creation may continue to be the patrimony of everyone, to hand down in all its beauty to future generations.

Many of the countries where you work know the scandal of war. Working for the development of peoples, you are also cooperating to build peace, seeking with tenacious determination to disarm minds, to draw people near, to build bridges between cultures and religions. Faith will help you to do so even in the most difficult countries, where the spiral of violence seems to leave no room for reason. Your activity in refugee camps is a sign of peace and hope. There you encounter desperate people, faces marked by oppression, children who hunger for food, for liberty and for a future. How many people in the world flee from the horrors of war! How many people are being persecuted because of their faith, forced to abandon their homes, their places of worship, their lands, their loved ones! How many lives are torn apart! How much suffering and how much destruction! In light of all this, a disciple of Christ does not draw back, does not turn his face away, but seeks to take on this painful humanity with closeness and evangelical welcome.

I am thinking of migrants and refugees, who seek to leave behind harsh living conditions and every type of danger. Cooperation is needed from everyone, institutions, NGOs and ecclesial communities, to promote paths of harmonious coexistence among various people and cultures. Migratory movements call for appropriate reception procedures that do not leave migrants adrift at sea or in the hands of unscrupulous traffickers. At the same time, effective collaboration is necessary among states, in order to efficiently regulate and manage such phenomena.

Dear brothers and sisters, working in your Federation, in existence for over 40 years, volunteers have been true witnesses of charity, peace makers, architects of justice and solidarity. I encourage you to persevere with joy on this path of faithfulness to mankind and to God, placing the person of Jesus every more at the centre. He will really help you find the time every day for personal encounter with God in prayer: this will be your strength in the most difficult times of disillusion, loneliness and misunderstanding. I entrust each of you and the organizations of your Federation to the protection of Most Holy Mary. May my blessing also accompany you. And remember to pray for me! Thank you.

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