

## Poverty and development - Perspectives from Haiti

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Distinguished members of this Assembly,

First of all I would like to express my gratitude to the *Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice* Foundation for inviting me to the CAPP / Fordham University Conference to share some perspectives from Haiti on the subject of Poverty and Development. Here we have a gathering of international experts, academic and religious authorities and professionals in the world of finance. It demonstrates great interest and attention to the people of Haiti, four years after the earthquake of 12 January 2010 that violently hit our country. The journey travelled since then has been long and difficult. Huge challenges remain, but the people of Haiti are full of determination and hope.

My talk will be based on three essential aspects:

- First of all, I shall present the context of Haiti with regard to the most serious challenges facing the country during its current process of development.
- Then I shall speak of the response of the Church in Haiti in helping to address these challenges.
- - Finally, I shall conclude with a call for national and international solidarity.

### **1. The context**

It is evident that the challenges are numerous in Haiti in 2014. Nevertheless, I would like to speak to you about some positive openings and good news that have emerged in Haiti since the earthquake through facts and indicators seen in some sectors.

I am happy to say that, according to the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index of the World Economic Forum, Haiti is now present on the world tourism map. Since 2013, Haiti is also a member of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and presently holds the chairmanship of this regional institution.

I should mention here that, according to the Haitian Association of Economists, the 2012-2013 financial report showed that investments registered 6.02% growth. Direct foreign investments have increased by 7%. Exports have improved and have registered growth of 3.5%. The Transport and Communications branch of the tertiary sector has shown an increase of 4.9% in real terms. This is due to the fact that these companies offer communications services (telephone services) which dominate this sector. Seventy-seven (77%) per cent of Haitian families have a mobile telephone and 55% have a radio.

To this list of good news we can add the restoration and construction of new roads and public squares, the installation of lighting on some streets, the help that is being given to agriculture through subsidies for fertilisers, and the clear desire to invest qualitatively and quantitatively in education. It is not an exaggeration to say that now, two years before the Millennium Development Goals deadline, Haiti has made good progress with regard to universal access to primary education. The Programme for Free and Compulsory Universal Education (PSUGO) created by the state of Haiti has led to free schooling for over a million pupils in the first two cycles of compulsory education.

In spite of these positive indicators and sources of good news, Haiti is still behind in the process of reaching the economic development necessary to guarantee greater wellbeing for the population. There are huge challenges being presented by obstacles to real development in this country. The Global Energy Architecture Performance Index Report for 2014 states that Haiti is the only country in the region that faces big

challenges in areas like access to energy. 70% of the population are without access to electricity. According to the latest Mortality, Morbidity and Service Utilization Survey (EMMUS 2012), one third of Haitian families (34%) spend at least 30 minutes each day obtaining drinking water. The same study reports that almost half of all families (44%) are without adequate sanitation services. In rural zones, 38% of families lack sanitation services compared to 7% in urban areas and settlements. The rate of unemployment remains very high with 60% of the population without work. The cost of living is affecting more and more people at all levels of society. The latest Charter on Poverty in Haiti reveals that over one third of the population are living in poverty, and over a million of these are living in extreme poverty.

To sum up, this quick summary overview shows how Haiti is undergoing slower economic growth than other countries in the region. Of course progress has been made and continues to advance. Nevertheless, Haiti is far from being a country where everyone can live in dignity because 70% of the population are living on less than 2 US dollars per day.

Today, the reduction of poverty is one of the most essential components of national policies for sustainable development and of public policies for development. The Catholic Church in Haiti is aware of this. We continue to address the huge challenges that call on our conscience as Christians to “*achieve a just and lasting solution*”, in the words of the Holy Father (Message for World Food Day 2013).

## **2. The response from the Church in Haiti**

I shall limit my talk to the response being given by the Church in Haiti in three sectors. These are the sector of education, agriculture and health.

### **2.1 Education**

Regarding education, for the period 2011-2014, the Bishops' Commission for Catholic Education (CEEC) had 2,400 Catholic schools in the country. Of these, 2,037 are compulsory level and 363 are secondary level. We have 72 Catholic technical schools.

In all of the dioceses, the CEEC, with the help of national partners (teachers, the State, the private sector in Haiti) and international (the Orthodox Churches and several organisations like CRS, the University of Notre Dame in Indiana, etc.), has undertaken activities to improve the quality of education and to help students to achieve more. The following means are used:

- a) the ongoing training of teachers and principals
- b) the structuring of educational communities composed of pupils, parents and teachers
- c) the creation of diocesan and parochial committees dedicated to education
- d) the provision of education that is accessible to all children of school age
- e) the provision of adequate salaries for teachers. In this area, the solidarity shown by the Orthodox Churches and the help of several organisations have been of great help.

### **2.2 Agriculture**

Caritas in Haiti were able to respond to some of the challenges in this sector with national and international help. This can be seen in several dioceses through the action taken during the period 2010-2013. Caritas intensified their activities in training farmers in agricultural practices that respect technical standards and take into account the safeguarding of the environment.

Caritas restored some irrigation systems.

*(Berrete / Jérémie = improvement of the distribution of irrigation water and the clearing of plots of land: 3000 ml of primary canals were cleared and 2000 ml of secondary canals; 580 ml of primary canals were built; 160m<sup>3</sup> of gabions were put into operation and 3 information gatherings were held).*

Caritas worked on improving access to drinking water.

*(The example of Jacmel: the building of 130 family tanks; the distribution of 144,000 US dollars worth of chlorine and purification tablets to treat the water, and the distribution of 800 Jerrican waste bins to 6,000 families).*

Caritas also worked on reducing the effects of erosion.

*(In this area, they carried out the following activities: 24 training seminars to reinforce organisation; the creation of 300 plots of ferns; the stabilisation of 2482 hectares of land; the production of 72,000 ml of living platforms; the approval and application of topics discussed by 300 farmers; the transplant of 404,150 seedlings of forest and fruit trees; the construction of 1,931 agro-ecological gardens; the putting into practice of skills acquired by 1,950 farmers; the installation of 13,698 ml of anti-erosive structures.)*

Positive impacts were seen that indicate an improvement in living conditions. These are a reduction in diseases that are caused by lack of water, the use of bad-quality water, and the neglect or ignorance of sanitation principles; a reduction in environmental pollution caused by the presence of fertilizer left abandoned in the soil; the reduction in the amount of soil eroded by heavy rain; a better distribution of water at the level of land holdings.

### 2.3. Health

The Catholic Church in Haiti, with the help of national and international solidarity, makes a considerable contribution to the Haitian health system. This can be seen at two levels:

- 1) Medical and health training. The University of Notre Dame in Haiti (UNDH) has faculties in Medicine, Pharmacy and Medical Biology and a School of Nursing in almost every diocese. This is a positive factor in providing more human resources in the area of health.
- 2) Health structures and infrastructure. A Bishops' Commission for Health (CESA) was created which led to the formation of Diocesan Commissions for Health (CDS). The most important of our Church structures is the Hospital of Saint Francis de Sales, and it will soon be ready to provide all health services. In many parishes there is a clinic run by the Church.
- 3) Healthcare. CARITAS HAITI has a health service that allows the Church to provide healthcare for the population. In addition to the services of the Ministry for Public Health and Population, the Church has its own health structures and can intervene at the level of prevention and treatment in cases of epidemics.

The Church in Haiti is aware of its mission to save all of humanity and, faithful to the teaching of the magisterium, it makes its own the sorrows, joys and sufferings of the people of Haiti. Recently, the Church mediated between political leaders to create a favourable climate for the country to develop. The Church stands with the men and women of Haiti, and continues to undertake specific activities to help respond to all their needs. In this battle with poverty, there is the huge challenge of reconstruction facing the Haitian people. For this reason, national and international solidarity are more and more necessary.

### **3. Recommendation: a call for solidarity**

Haiti cannot address all of these challenges alone. Likewise, Haiti cannot walk the path of progress alone and make a quantitative and qualitative jump towards development. The Holy Father said in his message for World Food Day: *“It is only in standing firmly united, by overcoming selfish ways of thinking and partisan interests, that the objective of eliminating forms of indigence determined by a lack of food will also be achieved”*.

Following the example of the Pope, and in the name of the Church of Haiti, I appeal for national and international solidarity in addressing the problems of poverty. Haiti still needs help from the international community and it needs national solidarity to try to find adequate responses to the problem of poverty that attacks the dignity of its sons and daughters. In the name of true fellowship which the Pope praised in his message for the World Day of Peace 2014, the kind of fellowship that must be experienced, proclaimed and witnessed, Haiti insistently asks the international community to take “a step forward” and persevere in solidarity. I am convinced that the international community will continue to help Haiti along the challenging journey of development.

To conclude my talk, I would like to defend the cause of national and international solidarity. Solidarity is certainly not just a form of assistance, nor is it circumstantial nor a once-off activity in response to disasters. The solidarity I am speaking of and that I defend is as follows:

1. New: in the sense that there must be profound change in the behaviour and attitudes shown by all sides.
2. Sustainable: Haiti expects the international community to renew their commitment and stand firm for the long term with this country as it rebuilds itself.
3. Participatory: where authorities and communities are involved in finding solutions and local skills are reinforced and used.
4. Continuous: Haiti expects the international community to mobilise their own financial and human resources not only for emergency situations, but also continuously until the country becomes autonomous.
5. Coordinated: in order to obtain the best result, our actions must be coordinated.
6. Active: so that those involved may come together to define policies, priorities and strategies for sustainable development.
7. Citizen participation: in the sense that civil society may be fully involved and take on their responsibility.

To you, dear participants at this conference, I wish to express my deepest wishes for the successful outcome of this meeting. Let me borrow words used by the Holy Father for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees and say, it is thanks to you that Haiti can continue to “experience fraternal solidarity and the warmth of friendship”. May Almighty God bless you all. Thank you.