

Update on the recent media controversy regarding DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE

Over the past six weeks, DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE has been profiled and highlighted in a series of articles in the media from the international anti-abortion advocacy movement. These articles have focused on the work of Development and Peace with our international partners, alleging that DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE and our partners are actively funding and promoting abortion in a number of countries in the Global South.

At the National Council meeting of DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE on March 20-22, 2009, the National Council reviewed the initial allegations relating to a group of five DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE partners in Mexico, and issued clarifications and an official response, jointly signed by the DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE President and the Executive Director. This response was posted on the Development and Peace Website and distributed to our network and various media sources.

Media coverage of this controversy, which arose during the annual Share Lent campaign of DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE in the Catholic parishes and dioceses across Canada, invoked concern by a number of Canadian bishops and Catholic faithful in several dioceses in different areas of the country.

In response to these expressed concerns, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB) appointed a commission of inquiry to review the programs of these five Mexican partners, who were alleged to be actively supporting abortion with the financial support of DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE. These allegations arose from the participation of these five NGO partner groups in a United Nations review and consultation regarding the human rights situation in Mexico, and that our five partners were signatories to the official consultation document of the UN.

The CCCB delegation comprised two Canadian bishops, the Secretary-General of the CCCB, and a representative from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. The delegation visited Mexico City April 15-18 2009 as part of its review, and met with the Mexico Conference of Catholic Bishops and with the five NGO partners of DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE. A report on the delegation's findings is being prepared and will be presented to the Permanent Council of the CCCB at its next meeting in June 2009.

The controversy has since spread beyond the five NGO partners in Mexico, as the anti-abortion advocates have published further allegations relating to more than 30 of DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE's partners in 17 different countries. In the media coverage, members of the Catholic clergy and international Catholic networks and organizations have been linked with these allegations of support for abortion.

As noted in the National Council document on our Website, DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE is not supporting, has never, and never will support abortion or any programs that contravene our foundational Gospel values and Catholic Social Teaching. Our partnerships are based on long-standing professional relationships with our partners, together in solidarity with the global movement for social justice and a

preferential option for the poor, based on shared values and a common approach to long-term integrated human development.

This recent media campaign has not been limited to one country, either in the North or in the Global South, and now fully involves an international anti-abortion advocacy movement active within the Catholic Church. Modern Internet-based communications technology and networks have rendered this a controversy without national borders, and engages us in a global Church-wide dialogue.

Hence, we are not responding on a case-by-case basis to the misleading and false information being spread relating to our work, our partners, and our involvement in international Catholic networks. Rather, we are engaging in a close dialogue with our bishops, our partners, our members, and with our colleagues involved in the international Catholic social justice movement to ensure that our work and our programs continue to respond in solidarity to the needs of our sisters and brothers among the poor and marginalized in the Global South.

We pray that this discussion within our Church communion will continue to be guided by the Gospel values that underlie all of our work, and will serve to highlight the spirit of Christian compassion, charity, and solidarity that unites us in common cause against the forces of social injustice, intolerance, and lack of respect for the dignity and rights of all.

Michael Casey
Executive Director
DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE

April 22, 2009