

Sustainable development and the future of work

Caritas Internationalis, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and the International Labour Organization strengthened ties to promote decent work at a conference held in Rome from 2-6th May.

The three bodies convened participants dedicated to work issues at the local, national and international levels to discuss 'Sustainable Development and the Future of Work in the Context of the Jubilee of Mercy'. These included representatives of grassroots, Catholic-inspired and other religious organisations; trade unions; associations of employers; and other groups involved in the promotion of decent work.

"At the heart of the conference and our work together was the conviction that people, including workers, their families, and communities, should be placed at the centre of sustainable development policies as we plan for the future of the global community," said Msgr. Robert Vitillo, head of Caritas Internationalis' Geneva office.

In his 2015 encyclical letter *Laudato Si'* wrote, 'Work is a necessity, part of the meaning of life on this earth, a path to growth, human development and personal fulfilment'."

The challenges facing workers in many countries are wide spread and deeply-rooted. These include child labour; forced labour, trafficking and other forms of modern slavery, discrimination, unemployment, lack of recognition of rights or the provision of social protection mechanisms children, the sick, the disabled, the unemployed or the elderly.

In his opening address at the conference, President of the Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace, Cardinal Peter Turkson, reminded the participants of the Catholic Church's commitment to social justice in the world of work, telling them that Blessed Pope Paul VI set up the Pontifical Council 50 years ago 'to stimulate the Catholic community to foster development in needy regions and social justice among nations'.

Cardinal Turkson echoed Pope Francis' call for an integrated and multi-faced approach towards the global challenges that lead to poverty and injustice. The approach calls for governments, organisations, the business world, and many other global actors to work together in seeking solutions.

Citing *Laudato Si'*, Cardinal Turkson said that, "decent and sustainable work is fundamental to how we care for our common home. Work acquires its true character when it is decent and sustainable for workers, employers, governments, communities, and the environment. Such work is the means for developing and expressing every individual's human dignity, and it participates in the ongoing creative work of God."

While issuing a Final Statement of Commitment and Action, those present at the conference pledged themselves and their organisations to on-going promotion of exchange and dialogue among organisations involved in the world of work, to boost engagement with other religious structures and communities and to engage in social dialogue between and among those living in countries of the South and the North.

Commenting on the declaration, Mr. Guy Ryder, Director General of the International Labour Organization said : “This declaration made me happy. The ILO will try to play its role in the realization of this declaration. I found there an echo of a message that was transmitted to the ILO in the year 2000, by Pope Jean Paul II, He launched a call for a global coalition for decent work. With our current circumstances, with the opportunity offered by the adoption of the 2030 development agenda, with the strong decent work that runs through this agenda ... we have an extraordinary opportunity to move forward with the values and objectives that we share. And what better way to do it, than by putting into real action, a response to that call in year 2000. I think the embryo is here, with the declaration that you have adopted... We can go ahead together. Count on the ILO to play its role in this effort.”

Pope Francis showed his support of the conference at his address to those gathered in St Peter’s Square on 1st May, “I hope that this event can create awareness among authorities, political and economic institutions and civil society, so that a model of development will be promoted that takes into account human dignity in full respect of standards on work and the environment.”

