

Cardinal Warns 400,000 More Children Could Die

Appeals to Rich Countries to Stop Retracting Foreign Aid

VATICAN CITY, MAY 6, 2009 (Zenit.org).- The president of Caritas Internationalis is appealing to wealthy countries in this time of economic crisis to remember the poor, asking them not to retract foreign aid in favor of national bailouts.

Cardinal Oscar Rodríguez Maradiaga, archbishop of Tegucigalpa, Honduras, made this appeal in an address to Holy See ambassadors from a dozen European countries at the Caritas headquarters in the Vatican.

He spoke about how the economic crisis, cuts to foreign aid and climate change affect the poor of the world, Caritas reported today.

The cardinal noted that the "poor are suffering" because wealthier countries are directing funds to bailouts, while cutting back or "not honoring their commitment to aid."

He told the ambassadors that up to 400,000 more children could die every year if the economic crisis continues, and that millions of people could fall into poverty.

"Our fears are that the poorest people who have benefited least from decades of unequal economic growth will pay the greater price for this folly," Cardinal Rodríguez Maradiaga asserted.

"We can either greet 2009 with paralysis or as an opportunity for change," he said. This year, he added, could be the year to construct a "blueprint for a better world."

The cardinal called on international leaders to use their influence in order to persuade voters that "supporting the poor is not a fair-weather choice but a moral responsibility."

He added, "Each of us has a responsibility to promote and to protect the common good, and to hold our governments to account for their actions."

Referring to the Pauline year, Cardinal Rodríguez Maradiaga expressed the hope that the leaders of wealthy countries will experience their own "road to Damascus moment."

"There must be a conversion away from the old system of blind greed to one where our eyes are opened to justice and dignity for all," he said.

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