PROGRESSIO

Media Briefing: The Pope and Global Poverty

Global poverty and international development could be high on the agenda during Pope Benedict XVI's state visit to the UK from **16-19 September 2010**. Just days ahead of a crucial meeting of world leaders to discuss progress on the Millennium Development Goals in New York (on 20-22 September) it is expected that the Pope will use part of his visit to the UK to reinforce Catholic Church support for global action to eradicate poverty. The UK government has also signalled that poverty and development will be a key aspect of their discussions with the Holy See. This media briefing includes background information, facts and stats about the Pope, poverty and development.

What is the Holy See?

The Holy See is a **sovereign entity** which acts and speaks for the whole Catholic Church. It enjoys diplomatic relations with **178 states** and is a **permanent observer** at the UN. It has long-standing relations with the UK, with the Crown's first resident ambassador being sent to the Vatican in **1479** making the embassy to the Holy See the **UK's oldest**.

Why will the Pope be talking about global poverty during his UK visit?

Global poverty is an area of major shared concern for the Catholic Church and the UK government. As a key global player with **1.2 billion** followers worldwide – **17.5% of the world's population** – the Catholic Church is a crucial partner to the international community for the delivery of the **Millennium Development Goals by 2015**.

To this end, Pope Benedict has often written to world leaders ahead of crucial **G8, G20 and UN summits** reminding them not to forget the plight of the poor in the developing world. Overall, aid increases and debt cancellation have helped to get **40 million more children** into school since 2000. In that period too, the number of people with access to AIDS treatment has **increased from just 100,000 to over four million**. The proportion of the world's population living in poverty has fallen from a **third to a quarter**.[1]

The Holy See's contribution is key to this success. The Catholic Church reaches into every corner of the planet through its, **800,000 sisters/nuns**, **400,000 priests, 219,655 parishes**; placing it in a powerful and unique position in the fight poverty. As important as practical steps are, the real influence of the Holy See rests in its moral weight around poverty eradication.

What's the scale of the Catholic Church's involvement with the world's poor?

The Catholic Church plays a unique role in tackling global poverty:
- It is the world's **second largest international development body** after the UN.
- It is responsible for nearly **one quarter** of all health care provision in Africa.
- The Catholic Church is also one of the biggest global health providers. Worldwide it runs **5,246 hospitals**, **17,530 dispensaries**, **577 leprosy clinics**, **15,208 houses** for the elderly, chronically ill and people with physical and learning disabilities worldwide.
- In education, the Catholic Church provides around **12 million school places** in Sub Saharan Africa each year thereby offering educational opportunities to **many millions** of young people, helping to lift them out of poverty.
- Much of this front line relief work is carried out by members of **Caritas Internationalis**, a Vatican body which brings together some **165** national Catholic Aid agencies under a single umbrella. Together, these agencies make up one of the largest NGO confederations in the world.

What does the Pope say about the Millennium Development Goals?

- Pope Benedict says: **"Achieving the goal of eradicating extreme poverty by the year 2015 is one of the most important tasks in today's world...such an objective is indissolubly linked to world peace and security."** (Caritas in Veritate, 2009).

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[1] UK Department for International Development (DFID), Annual Report, 2009, Foreword, p2. Online here:
http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Documents/publications1/departmental-report/2009/volume1.pdf

About the global economy?

- Pope Benedict says: **"The market is not, and must not become, the place where the strong subdue the weak…in commercial relationships the principle of … fraternity can and must find their place within normal economic activity."** (Caritas in Veritate).
- He adds: **"Justice must be applied to every phase of economic activity…Locating resources, financing, production, consumption and all other phases in the economic cycle inevitably have moral implications. Thus every economic decision has moral consequence."** (Caritas in Veritate).

On the environment?

- Pope Benedict says: **"The environment is God's gift to everyone, and in our use of it we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole."** (Caritas in Veritate).
- He has also said: **"The natural environment is more than raw material to be manipulated at our pleasure; it is a wondrous work of the Creator containing a 'grammar' which sets forth ends and criteria for its wise use, not its reckless exploitation."** (Caritas in Veritate).

On international aid?

- Pope Benedict says: **"Economic aid, in order to be true to its purpose, must not pursue secondary objectives. It must be distributed with the involvement not only of the governments of receiving countries, but also local economic agents and the bearers of culture within civil society, including local churches. Aid programmes must increasingly acquire the characteristics of participation and completion from the grass roots."** (Caritas in Veritate).
- Pope Benedict has also said: **"In the search for solutions to the current economic crisis, development aid for poor countries must be considered a valid means of creating wealth for all."** (Caritas in Veritate).
- He adds: **"More economically developed nations should do all they can to allocate larger portions of their gross domestic product to development aid, thus respecting the obligations that the international community has undertaken in this regard."** (Caritas in Veritate).

Catholic Social Teaching

Many of the underlying themes of Catholic thought on poverty which Pope Benedict will draw come from a tradition known as **Catholic Social Teaching**. This is a body of thought and insights which have been developed by the Church in the process of applying Christian teaching and belief to contemporary questions of how best human beings can live together in a changing world. It addresses issues of **social cohesion**, **economic activity**, **and political processes**. It looks at the relationship between **rights and duties**, and of the importance of a **thriving civil society** alongside government agencies and the private sector.

Caritas in Veritate

Pope Benedict's third 'letter' (encyclical) *Caritas in Veritate* (Charity in Truth) was released in **June 2009** and focuses strongly on issues of **poverty**, **development** and **environment**. It also provides a thorough analysis of the ethics of business and the role of business, the state and the individual. To read it online see: www.vatican.va

What is Progressio?

Progressio is a UK-based charity with Catholic roots working internationally in 11 developing countries to enable people to challenge and change the situations that keep them poor. We are independent of the Catholic Church, but faith grounds our values and is the starting place for our unique combination of Catholic and secular approaches to challenging poverty and injustice.

Where can I find out more?

Visit Progressio's website for further info. Progressio staff, many of them experts in faith and key issues in international development, will be available ahead of and during the Pope's visit for interviews and/or background briefings. To arrange a chat contact Progressio's Media Officer, **Jo Barrett**, on 0207 288 8619 or 07940 703911 or jo@progressio.org.uk

Sources: The majority of facts and figures used in this briefing are taken from *Heart speaks unto heart, the visit of Pope Benedict XVI.* To download a copy, visit: http://www.thepapalvisit.org.uk/2010-Visit/Booklet-The-Pope-in-the-UK

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