



June 19, 2013

**‘BE IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE PEOPLE OF SYRIA IN THEIR MANY SUFFERINGS’:  
Invitation to the Catholics of Canada  
from the President of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Pope Francis has appealed to Catholic charitable organizations to cooperate in providing humanitarian aid for Syrians who have lost homes, are displaced, or are refugees. He has expressed deep “concern for the crisis in Syria and, in a particular way, for the people, often defenceless, who are suffering as a result of it.” The Holy Father is asking all of us to offer concrete assistance to the Syrian people.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, together with the Pope and all the Bishops of Canada, I invite you, through prayer and in works of charity, to be in solidarity with the people of Syria in their many sufferings due to war, violence and displacement. As a community of faith, let us pray to God to bring justice, peace and healing to the region. Let each of us do what we can to provide assistance and aid to our suffering brothers and sisters in Syria and its neighbouring countries.

Joint emergency campaign with Development and Peace for Syria

The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB) and the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace (CCODP) are launching a joint campaign to raise emergency aid for Syrian refugees.<sup>2</sup> We invite your participation. The revenues collected will assist the extensive work in the Middle East by Catholic charities and development agencies, particularly *Caritas Internationalis*.<sup>3</sup>

**Our special joint emergency campaign for Syria begins Sunday, 30 June 2013, and will continue throughout the summer. It will culminate with a day of prayer and fasting for the people of Syria and all the Middle East on Saturday, 14 September 2013, the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. All donations to the special campaign should be sent to Development and Peace by 14 September.**

Syria’s humanitarian crisis

*Caritas Internationalis* and CCODP estimate the number of Syrians inside the country needing assistance to be about 7 million people. A third of Syrian hospitals are not functioning. Some 7,000 Syrians each day flee to Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt. It is believed this humanitarian crisis in Syria has already claimed some 90,000 lives.

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, address to participants in the meeting coordinating activities by Catholic charitable organizations working in Syria and neighbouring countries, promoted by the Pontifical Council “Cor Unum”, 5 June 2013

{[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/francesco/speeches/2013/june/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130605\\_corunum-siria\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/speeches/2013/june/documents/papa-francesco_20130605_corunum-siria_en.html)}.

<sup>2</sup> An outline of the work already underway by Development and Peace to assist Syrian refugees is found on its website at <http://www.devop.org/en/emergencies/syria>.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.caritas.org/>

Information from the United Nations Human Refugee Agency indicates already more than 1.6 million Syrians are seeking refuge in foreign countries. Over 1 million of these have registered as refugees since the beginning of 2013. Three-quarters of these are women and children. The vast majority are completely dependent on aid, arriving with little more than the clothes on their backs. The numbers of destitute people place unprecedented strains on the communities, infrastructure and services of the host countries. It is estimated that by the end of 2013, half the population of Syria will be in need of aid. This includes an anticipated 3.45 million Syrian refugees and 6.8 million Syrians inside the country, many of them displaced from their homes.<sup>4</sup>

### Catholic efforts to assist Syria

In addition to the work of CCODP with its sister Caritas agencies around the world, CCODP will be working with CNEWA-Canada<sup>5</sup> and Jesuit Refugee Service<sup>6</sup> as well as other Catholic agencies in the region to bring aid to the victims of this humanitarian tragedy. Here in Canada, a number of dioceses and religious communities are working to bring Syrian and other Middle Eastern refugees to our country to find new homes and safety. These collaborative initiatives are worthy of our assistance, encouragement and support.

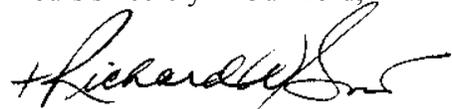
### Fasting and praying for Syria and the Middle East

Of course, all our efforts must be supported by intense prayer. When we fast and pray for the people of Syria and the Middle East on 14 September, let us lift up to the Lord the needs of the Syrian homeless and wounded, their broken families and shattered lives, and pray for an end to the hostilities and for lasting peace.

Please check with your diocese and parish about plans to participate in the joint emergency collection for Syria, and to be part of our 14 September day of prayer and fasting for Syria and the Middle East. More information on the campaign and the day of prayer and fasting can be found on the websites of the CCCB and CCODP.<sup>7</sup>

Pope Francis has said that “The destiny of the Syrian people is a concern that is close to my heart.” This concern, found also in our own hearts, is the motive for our solidarity in prayer and works of charity. Thank you for your support.

Yours sincerely in Our Lord,



+ Richard W. Smith  
Archbishop of Edmonton and  
President of the Canadian Conference  
of Catholic Bishops

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<sup>4</sup> UNHRC (United Nations Human Refugee Agency), “Stories from Syrian Refugees: Discovering the human faces of a tragedy” {<http://www.data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/syria.php>}.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.cnewa.ca>.

<sup>6</sup> Jesuit Refugee Service, <http://www.jrs.net>.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.cccb.ca>.