**Report of the Committee of Inquiry
of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops
concerning Mexican Non-Governmental Organizations
Partners of Development and Peace**

Following allegations by *Lifesite News* in March 2009 against the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB) delegated us, the two undersigned Bishops – Most Reverend Martin William Currie, Archbishop of St. John's and Bishop of Grand Falls, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Most Reverend François Lapierre, P.M.É., Bishop of Saint-Hyacinthe, Quebec – to meet with representatives of the Episcopal Conference of Mexico and the organizations concerned, and to inquire into the merits of the allegations.

We were assisted by Msgr. Carlos Quintana, C.S.S., Executive Director of the National Collection for the Church in Latin America of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops; Msgr. Mario Paquette, P.H., General Secretary of the CCCB; and three persons from Development and Peace who saw to travel arrangements and other organising: Messrs Michael Casey, Executive Director, Paul Cliche, Deputy Director of the International Programs Department, and André Charlebois, Program Officer for Latin America.

Embarking on the mission entrusted to us by the CCCB, we traveled to Mexico on 15 April 2009 and met the following day with the representatives of the Mexican Bishops. From then until 18 April 2009 we visited the organizations concerned and held discussions with their leadership.

The meeting with the Mexican Episcopal Conference was at the Conference offices and chaired by Bishop Rodrigo Aguilar Martínez, Chairman of the Commission for Family, Youth and Laity. Also in attendance were Bishop Luis Artemio Flores Calzada, a member of the Commission for Social Ministry and responsible for Caritas-Mexico; Bishop Leopoldo González González, General Secretary of the Mexican Episcopal Conference; Father Armando Flores Navarro, Secretary of Caritas-Mexico; and Doctor María del Pilar Calva, a physician and bioethics advisor to the Commission for Family, Youth and Laity.

After the first day of discussions with the representatives of the Mexican Episcopal Conference, the Committee of Inquiry was involved in two days of meetings with the five Mexican organizations denounced by *Lifesite*, with separate visits to the offices of three of these organizations.

In view of the investigation by the Committee of Inquiry, including a review of the work by the Mexican organizations in question, as well as an examination of their involvement in Mexican society and of their basic principles on questions involving both abortion and the protection of human life, the Committee conveys the following reflections and hopes.

Reflections and Hopes

1. In conclusion of our inquiry regarding the Mexican Episcopal Conference and the five non-governmental organizations in question, we believe the allegations by

Lifesite News – that financial assistance by the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace (CCODP) aided projects related to the promotion of abortion – are not founded on the facts. Moreover, Development and Peace does not finance organizations, but provides assistance to specific projects. Our exchanges with these particular organizations clearly showed their activities concern the defence of human rights. We questioned their leadership for considerable time, and confronted them with the allegations and accusations we had heard, but did not find any evidence that they have been implicated in promoting abortion.

2. We recognize that the five Mexican organizations assisted by Development and Peace were imprudent in signing the "Report on Civil Society Organizations for Universal Periodic Review". At the same time, we understand how, working in difficult circumstances, the intention was to be in solidarity with the more than 50 other groups working for human rights in Mexico, including religious orders such as the Dominicans and Jesuits. Unfortunately, however, the Report they endorsed contains several orientations not in accordance with the teaching of the Catholic Church.

3. We hope the present circumstances encourage Development and Peace to be more vigilant in analysing requests for financial assistance and more demanding about receiving information from possible partners. While recognizing the good relations and communications that already exist between CCODP and the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, we would encourage Development and Peace to ensure more thorough consultations with the Bishops of Canada, particularly the two Bishops who are appointed as members of the Development and Peace National Council, especially when there are questions involving moral issues such as abortion and contraception.

4. We recommend to the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops that it continue to support the organization it founded more than forty years ago, and do all it can to encourage Development and Peace staff to develop a good and sound understanding of the social doctrine of the Church. Only this way will the confidence of Catholics be restored who have been bewildered by the *Lifesite* allegations, and Canadian Catholics encouraged to continue being generous in providing humanitarian aid in the name of their Catholic faith.

5. We regret that the Mexican organizations have so little or no relation with the Episcopal Conference of their country. The practical understanding they have of various social problems and the useful analysis they can provide could serve, it seems to us, in preparing orientations for social and pastoral ministry that would benefit many who are poor and looking for dignity and freedom. We consider it important for Development and Peace to foster good relations with the Bishops of those countries where groups receive CCODP financial assistance, while also continuing to work closely with Caritas Internationalis.

6. We make an urgent appeal to the leadership of *Lifesite* News that it establish an open and fruitful dialogue with Canadian Catholic groups. We are convinced that when a group makes allegations, accusations and denunciations against another, this can bring nothing positive to our Church and is a counter-witness to that Gospel spirit

that should guide all Christians. Negative actions of this kind encourage suspicion, scandal and division in the Church. We also hope there will be a means for frank and transparent dialogue between *Lifesite* and the Bishops of Canada. We know our

brother Bishops share this concern for unity and mutual respect which should be characteristic of the Catholic Church in our country

7. Finally, we urge the Bishops of Canada and the leadership of social justice and pro-life groups to recognize there is a continuum and integrity to all human life issues. The dignity of each human life is to be protected and promoted from conception to natural death. Thus there is an urgency to all that threatens the dignity and sacredness of human life, including violence, hunger, poverty and oppression. "The Church sees in men and women, in every person, the living image of God himself" (***Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church,*** no. 105).

18 June 2009

+ Martin William Currie
Archbishop of St. John's
and Bishop of Grand Falls

+ François Lapierre, P.M.É.
Bishop of Saint-Hyacinthe