



DIALOGUE

GIVING A VOICE TO THE INVISIBLE

“Africa has a voice, but it isn’t being heard. Help it to be heard, continuing to speak out to cast light on the unseen.” The Holy Father himself made this request of us, and we will indeed continue to honor our commitment to work hand in hand with Africans to overcome this latest of countless war-driven economic and social crises.

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“This is an unseen ‘war’ that nobody talks about, that sometimes seems not even to exist. But it does, and it is having dire consequences, especially on the poorest. (...) Food prices are escalating everywhere, causing hunger and malnutrition; health transports are getting stuck due to the excessive cost of fuel; and drugs and medical supplies are scarce.”

This is what the Holy Father Pope Francis told the Doctors with Africa CUAMM community at the Vatican on the occasion of our 19 November 2022 Annual Meeting. It was enormously uplifting to have the opportunity to talk about “our” Africa and daily work in his presence, feeling his support for our determination to continue to stand side by side with those who are invisible, marginalized and vulnerable.

In recent months, Africa has been experiencing a “ricochet war”, with inflation and an economic crisis that have sent everyday costs soaring. Our key problem in terms of hospital management in countries like Sierra Leone has become the electric supply. Only generators can guarantee the power and services we need; without one, everything risks coming to a standstill. The same goes for fuel. We have the same resources as ever to pay for it, yet its price has tripled, and when we run out of it, transportation grinds to a halt. The system that we worked so hard in recent years to build to transport those in need from peripheral areas to hospitals stops functioning for days on end, with sick individuals unable to get the care they require. Another of the “invisible” phenomena encountered daily by CUAMM is the war’s impact on food prices: those of wheat and rice have risen precipitously, hindering the ability of many to buy basic necessities for their families and making the already worrying specter of malnutrition even more alarming.

These repercussions of war for seemingly far-off, fragile parts of the world underscore the invisible threads that bind human beings everywhere. We are but one world, one humankind, and – as Giovanni Putoto describes later in this issue – the war in Ukraine is dragging Africa, too, backwards, exacerbating its own wars and armed conflicts. At the same time, as COP 27 in Egypt last month underscored and sought to address, it is the world’s poorest countries, Africa’s in particular, that are being hit hardest by climate change, their citizens paying the price for the far greater consumption of their wealthier counterparts.

Notwithstanding these challenges, we must continue to look ahead, keeping a steady focus on fulfilling our commitment in the field, hospitals, health centers and, increasingly, in terms of skills-training as well. Indeed, we recounted to Pope Francis our organization’s commitment to invest more and more in people and skills over the next five years, based on our recognition of the vital importance that human resources play in health care. In partnership with health authorities, professional bodies and specialized agencies in the countries in which we work, we plan to foster the development of community agents and help them orient themselves within health systems; to facilitate the professional development, retention and task shifting of health personnel in remote areas; and to provide support to the schools and universities entrusted with the training of qualified health workers (physicians and non-medical personnel) planning to work in primary health care. CUAMM focuses particular attention on the growing involvement of young African women and men in the work sphere, specifically in the area of research and innovation – the only way to help them fulfill their aspirations to be an active part of this continent’s rehabilitation.

Here were the words the Holy Father dedicated to us: “May the Lord help you get through this night with courage, the light of dawn leading your hearts and illuminating those tiny, already perceptible, shoots of hope, that you yourselves are actual witnesses to. I thank you for letting the world know what Africa is experiencing, for laying bare the unseen and unheard sufferings of the disadvantaged people you meet every day; and I urge you to continue to stand up on behalf of Africa, to help it express itself in ways that people will really hear. For Africa *has* a voice, but it isn’t being heard. Help it to be heard, continuing to speak out to cast light on the unseen.” This is precisely what we will do, through our people and activities: give a voice to the invisible.