



Against the Defunding of Women's Groups in the Global South

The Anti-Woman Saga continues as the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB) takes over the control of Development and Peace (DP).

Taking a Stand

Three years ago, Development and Peace (DP) claimed to have 180 partners. Today there are 81 left. What happened? Under the aegis of the secretariat of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB), an “investigation” identified 63 partners from the Global South suspected of not following the teaching of the Catholic Church on sexual morality. The mere mention on these organizations’ websites of words and phrases such as sex education, sexual or reproductive health, contraception, abortion, masturbation or feminism would suffice for these partners to be summoned to explain themselves. The “survey” report concluded that 20 partners could continue their collaboration with DP, 19 partnerships that were expiring need not be renewed and 24 were to be excluded because they had failed to respond, to the investigators’ satisfaction, to questions concerning sexual morality. From now on, DP will have to obtain the authorization of the CCCB in order to establish any new partnership with groups in the Global South. This report was approved by the bishops in September 2020 and adopted by the National Council of DP on November 29, 2020. Members of the Council voted blindly on this report, without knowing the names of the 24 excluded partners, simply identified by numbers.

The articles of *Présence*—information religieuse provide precise and rigorous information which makes it possible to follow the chain of events.

Given this unacceptable situation which has particularly harmful repercussions for women in the Global South and which is contrary to elementary principles of law and social justice, we ask for the following in order to ensure fair, enlightened and transparent management:

- 1) that the report, with the names of the excluded partners, be made public;
- 2) that the vote of the National Council of DP be reconsidered in order to allow its members to make a fully informed decision and to grant excluded partners the right to a full and complete defence;
- 3) that the CCCB immediately cease its practice of interference with and control of DP, particularly with respect to the choice of partners from the Global South and to its over-representation on the Council;
- 4) that the founding principles of the social doctrine of the Church—justice, equality, dignity of persons, common good and solidarity—once again become the common thread in DP's free and autonomous discernment practices as it establishes its partnerships.

Challenging Questions

Solidarity with women of the Global South. What happens to women of the Global South who are affected by the 19 partnerships that were not renewed and the 24 partnerships that were excluded though they brought women some measure of comfort in their difficult lives? Are lives in danger, hopes of better lives shattered, poverty and violence further exacerbated? Three years ago, L'autre Parole was able to support Fanm Deside from Jacmel in Haiti. It had been informed of the harassment suffered by the group. The solidarity expressed by many organizations in Quebec has undoubtedly helped to ensure that DP and the CCCB reconsider their positions. Fanm Deside is still receiving its funding. We are delighted. And we are convinced that the majority of recently excluded groups should regain their funding if the principles of social justice were applied in their assessment.

Questions regarding Development and Peace. We no longer recognize this organization which was founded more than 50 years ago in the wake of Vatican II with the intent of allowing the laity to implement the social doctrine of the Church through practices of international development and solidarity. We know that there are competent lay women and men among DP members, staff and volunteers, people with solid expertise in development and deep commitment to the gospel, but they seem to have been silenced. We would like to hear from them. Discernment based on the principles of social justice is superseded by clerical obsessions for control of sexual issues, particularly those of women. Opaque management practices, cloaked in secrecy and submission, impede the proper functioning of DP. No one will object to seeing DP withdraw its support from partners who engage in mismanagement practices or practices that are inconsistent with social

justice. And we can understand that, in a tight financial situation, DP is forced to make difficult choices. But, if this must be done, let it be on the basis of transparent and rational criteria of social justice and of responsible management, and not on the basis of apparent sexual conformity. We remain in solidarity with the social justice mission of Development and Peace.

Disenchantment with the glaring moral contradictions of the Bishops of Quebec and the CCCB.

Honestly, do you believe you have the moral authority to dictate to women their sexual behaviour while abuse and sexual violence of all types continue to be perpetrated within your ranks, while clerics get nuns pregnant then force them to have abortions, and you delay helping the victims and cleaning up your own act? When the CCCB uses the power that it gets from money given by the faithful to impose its sexual morality on the people of the Global South, when development involves the humiliation of women of the Global South, we see neocolonialism and misogyny at work. When the CCCB does not attach the same value to the support given by Bishops of the Global South, often men of colour, to the development organizations of their country, as it does to the advice formulated by its secretariat in Ottawa, do you not think that this can be seen not only as a form of neo-colonialism but also as a form of institutional racism? Do you think that the secretariat of the CCCB exercises prudential judgment when it listens to the denunciations of Life Site News, an anti-choice organization whose videos have just been permanently excluded from the YouTube channel for its repeated practice of disinformation on COVID-19? When the CCCB practically takes control of Development and Peace, impeding the action of its lay workers, is it not practising a form of clericalism justly denounced by Pope Francis? Will you, Bishops of Quebec and of the CCCB, accept to hear your sisters of L'autre Parole?

Had we stopped hoping, we would not speak out. *Spes contra spem.*

Come, sisters and brothers in Christ, let us stand up! *Thalitha Kum!*

The collective L'autre Parole

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