Syria: daily heroism acknowledged by Caritas Switzerland

In silence, every day the heroism of a people in search of their soul goes unnoticed. We strive for a type of solidarity that rejects lines of demarcation between people; yet we are lost or forgotten in the media coverage.

Rome, 19 June 2014 – Yesterday marked the 2014 Prix Caritas ceremony in Lucerne, Switzerland. Nawras Sammour SJ, the Jesuit Refugee Service Middle East North Africa Director, received the award on behalf of JRS Syria.

The award honours JRS for our “tireless and courageous commitment for the benefit of the persecuted and suffering people in Syria. For bearing witness in the form of humanitarian aid, standing by people in need irrespective of their religious and ethnic affiliations”.

The Prix Caritas is an annual award made to persons for their outstanding achievements in the sphere of social work, development cooperation work or intercultural understanding.

Below is Fr Sammour’s acceptance speech.

Good evening ladies and gentlemen,

It is a privilege and an honour to be with you tonight. With all my heart I thank you for your kind invitation and for choosing me, and JRS Syria, for this award from Caritas Switzerland. I am deeply grateful.

At the moment, my thoughts go straight to Syria, to any member of the Syrian population who is suffering and, more specifically, to the silent majority of these great people.

The darkest pages of human history tell us that a person lives the greatest suffering when we do not have adequate means to express ourselves or to talk about our fear and anxiety. When language betrays us, and when words escape us when telling our story and the stories which our lives are built upon are destroyed. So I'm lucky to have this precious opportunity to speak before you.

Unfortunately, we know only too well: today, in Syria, death is commonplace, free and random. We see it every day and it can happen to anyone, anywhere at anytime. Dying has become a ubiquitous event, which gives added meaning to the phrase dear to Arabs "Inshallah" meaning "God willing."
Syria was once known for its natural beauty and the unique hospitality of its diverse population. Formerly a serene, human mosaic, before our very eyes, Syria is now synonymous with violence, division and destruction.

Faced with this dramatic reality, is there still room for hope? In the depths of this darkness, can we still hope, can a light emerge?

If I were to indulge in realism and rationale - as is my natural tendency - I would say that there is nothing more to be done. My answer would be negative, no doubt. But the words of Ignacio Ellacuria, a Jesuit martyr from El Salvador, have become a sort of mantra for me:

"But precisely where there is nothing to be done, absolutely everything should be remade”.

And herein lies my duty and my civic responsibility that I feel deeply, beyond all my limitations.

I am not alone in believing this, or saying it aloud and trying to live it.

My presence here at the Caritas Switzerland ceremony, as an individual is symbolic of the vibrant, living community that leads me to you. It is my church and my religious order. It is also all our staff and volunteers in Syria, men and women, Muslims, Christians, believers and non-believers of different communities, cultures and social classes.

They are individuals and families we are trying to serve and with whom I learned to love life. This is the very reason that resilience remains. This resilience and support is also common in our friends around the world, why, before an assembly like yours I always feel focused and supported by the international community. We are not alone.

We are suffering, of course, but filled with a mission of hope that goes beyond our limitations and capabilities. The solidarity of the international community means a lot. I wish to express my gratitude to all the Caritas family, and the Swiss people for this recognition and support.

In our meeting tonight, it is not only material assistance and support we should focus on. The intense suffering of Syrians deserves to be recognised. Syrians deserve to have their daily heroism witnessed. In silence, every day the heroism of a people in search of their soul goes unnoticed. We strive for a type of solidarity that rejects lines of demarcation between people; yet we are lost or forgotten in the media coverage.

Together we hope to find a way that will allow us to just hold on and resist falling into despair.

Press Contact Information
Zerene Haddad
middleeast.communications@jrs.net