



World Meeting of Popular Movements



The culture of encounter at the service of poor people and poor nations

As long as the problems of the poor are not radically resolved by rejecting the absolute autonomy of markets and financial speculation and by attacking the structural causes of inequality, no solution will be found for the world's problems or, for that matter, to any problems. Inequality (inequidad) is the root of social ills.¹

The thinking of Pope Francis, and how he has constantly accompanied the excluded in their struggles and their efforts to organize, have inspired and motivated us to hold this World Meeting of Popular Movements. We wish to bring to God, to the Church and to the world the voice of the voiceless. Not so that they raise their voice no more, but because they are silenced by those who hold economic power. We wish to practice the culture of encounter in the service of poor persons, of poor peoples and of this poor Church for the poor which, together with the Holy Father, we all long for. We want to listen to one other, to judge and to act on the basis of the lived experience of those sectors most seriously assaulted in their dignity by social injustice, by an economy of exclusion and by an idolatrous system of money. Together we want to discuss the structural causes of so much inequality (inequidad) which robs us of work (labor), housing (domus) and land (terra), which generates violence and destroys nature. We also want to face the challenge Francis himself sets puts to us with courage and intelligence: to seek radical proposals to resolve the problems of the poor.

This World Meeting of Popular Movements gathers social leaders from the five continents who

represent grassroots organizations established by those whose inalienable rights to decent work, decent housing and fertile land are undermined, threatened or denied outright. In the main, these movements represent three increasingly excluded social sectors: (a) workers who are at risk or lack job security, in the informal sector or self-employed, migrants, day- labourers and all those unprotected by labour rights or trade unions; (b) landless farmers, family farmers, indigenous people and those at risk of being driven out of the countryside by agro-speculation and violence; (c) the marginalized and forgotten, including squatters and inhabitants of peripheral neighbourhoods or informal settlements, without adequate urban infrastructure.

Also taking part in the meeting will be trade unions and social and human rights organisations which are close to these movements and which they have nominated to participate. Finally, we will have the participation of bishops and church workers coming from different countries, officials of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, and researchers of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences.

During three days of intensive work, the discussion will unfold around three key topics: land, housing and work. These rights should be accessible to every person and every people. However, they are increasingly out of reach for the great majority, especially of the new generations. Pope Francis has denounced this situation on countless occasions and has constantly argued for

- the centrality of **decent work** for the prosperity of families and peoples: *"It is through free, creative, participatory and mutually supportive labour, that human beings express and enhance the dignity of their lives."*²
- the undeniable right to **decent housing**: There are so *"many families who do not have a home, either because they never had one or because they lost it for any number of reasons. Family and home go together. It is very difficult to bring up a family without a home to live in... I invite everyone — persons, social institutions, authorities — to do everything possible so that every family might have a home."*³
- the importance of **farming families**: *"It is more and more necessary to acknowledge the role of rural families and develop their full potential... In fact, families encourage dialogue among different generations and lay the foundation for real social integration. They also represent the required synergy between agricultural work and sustainability. And who better than rural families can preserve nature for the coming generations? And who, more than rural families, is interested in cohesion between individuals and social groups?"*⁴

Within the framework of the meeting, two problems mainly affecting the excluded will also be addressed: fratricidal violence, and the destruction of environment. Pope Francis points out

the close relationship

- between war and the idolatrous economic system: *“A system that to survive has to make war (...) weapons are sold and, with this, the balance sheets of the idolatrous economies — the big global economies that sacrifice man at the feet of the idol of money — are obviously rendered healthy.”*⁵
- between violence and social inequality: *“The poor and the poorer peoples are accused of violence yet, without equal opportunities, the different forms of aggression and conflict, finding fertile terrain for growth, will eventually blow up.”*⁶

Likewise, the Holy Father warns that

- nature is at the mercy of economic power: *“In this system, which tends to devour everything which stands in the way of increased profits, whatever is fragile, like the environment, is defenceless before the interests of a deified market, which becomes the only rule.”*⁷
- nature is constantly under attack by the throw-away culture: *“God, our Father, has not entrusted the task of caring the land to money but to us, men and women. This is our task! However, men and women are sacrificed to the idols of exploitation and consumption: this is the throw-away culture.”*⁸

From the poorest sectors of society all around the world, the popular movements raise their voice in order to take on the lack of land, housing and work, in order to do away with violence and protect nature. They seek to enhance their indispensable contribution to the building of a more just and fraternal society, since *“the earth is our common home and all of us are brothers and sisters.”*⁹

We, the poor, want to take hold of our own destiny, and the Church wants to accompany this process. We understand that the diversity of experiences, thinking and contexts is no obstacle but rather enriches our discussion within the culture of encounter. We thank God for allowing us to hold this meeting, and we hope it will enhance both our understanding of the serious social problems afflicting us and the necessary coordination of actions to overcome them.

The Organizing Committee

1 *Evangelii Gaudium* (202)

2 *Evangelii Gaudium* (192)

3 Angelus, 22 December 2013

- 4 Message to José Graziano da Silva, Director of FAO, on World Food Day, 16 October 2014.
- 5 Interview of Pope Francis with the Spanish newspaper La Vanguardia
- 6 *Evangelii Gaudium* (59)
- 7 *Evangelii Gaudium* (56)
- 8 General Audience, Wednesday 5 June 2013
- 9 *Evangelii Gaudium* (183)