

Public Statement by the Jesuits of Canada
On the Review of Radio Progreso/ERIC
by the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace and the CCCB

In recent days, media outlets here in Canada have released the correspondence of Fr. Ismael Moreno, SJ, director of Fundacion Eric and Radio Progreso in Honduras, with the CCCB and the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace. We make the following statement in light of the fact that journalists have picked up this news, and because we are deeply concerned for the safety of our brothers and sisters in Honduras. We also consider the situation of Father Melo to be a matter of public interest, since the financial contributions made annually to CCODP come from thousands of faithful in parishes across Canada.

We learned in February of 2019 that significant amounts of money in funding for 52 Development and Peace partners were temporarily suspended following an investigation by CCCB staff and pending verification of their compliance with the Church's social and moral teachings. We were surprised to find among the affected partners, the Jesuit sponsored work Fundacion ERIC/Radio Progreso in Honduras, of which our Jesuit colleague Ismael Moreno, SJ, is the director.

Father Ismael Moreno (Padre Melo) is a member of the Jesuit province of Central America. Deeply rooted in gospel values and motivated by his Christian faith, Fr. Melo has dedicated his life to defending the fundamental human rights of the most marginalized and vulnerable people in his native country. His work has been internationally recognized by the Church and civil organizations.

Through both ERIC and Radio Progreso, Father Melo and his team have also sought to understand in depth the economic, political, and social causes of such great injustices; and denouncing those who are responsible for these evils.

As the result of his work, Fr. Melo and his team have suffered serious consequences in the form of countless death threats to the point where he is under police protection. Some members of his team and people with whom they work closely have paid with their lives for their commitment.

What information we have about the 2018 CCCB research findings on D&P Partners is of great concern to us. Our hope is that the criteria being used in the current process of review is comprehensive in its understanding of the Church's social teaching and its defence of life in all of its dimensions, at every stage, and in all its diversity; denouncing poverty as an affront to the dignity of women and men, promoting peace, protecting human rights as well as the environment.

Pope Francis has, in recent years, helped the Church articulate a way beyond the impasse of a too narrow understanding of the defence of life. He has reminded us that we must recover a robust awareness of the prudent and merciful discernment, the wise and patient sifting, that is needed when we apply the universal moral doctrine of the Church to particular cases.

This is what Fr. Melo means when he writes that we need to make a distinction between the opinions of people who speak on radio stations such as Radio Progreso, and the editorial directions and fundamental options of the institution, as well as the convictions of those in charge.

In a Honduran society where civic institutions have collapsed, social relations must be rebuilt, and violence serves as the rule of law, Radio Progreso and ERIC's editorial line seeks to create the conditions where the voices of civil society can be heard and political life reconstructed; it also seeks to open a space for the participation of the poorest in this social and civic conversation. Inevitably, voices that agree with much of the Church's social teaching, but not fully in accord with every aspect of it, will be heard; for this mission of service to the rebuilding of civil society to succeed, censorship on the basis of a narrow concern for a part of the overall teaching of the Church is dangerous, precisely because it excludes important actors in civil society.

In such a context, the power of social debate must be trusted. It is the mission of Fundacion ERIC and Radio Progreso to defend life in all of its dimensions, at every stage and in every situation. The texts put forward in the January 2018 review submitted to Padre Melo neither represent the essential character of their work, nor do they reveal the vast majority of the content of their publications.

For both the leaders of the Canadian Church and the directors of Development and Peace, we wish to reiterate our trust in our colleague Ismael Moreno and in the Jesuit works concerned. We know that the commitment of Father Melo and our lay collaborators is difficult to sustain in the current context of Honduras and that frequent death threats are made to them. We are concerned that the allegations currently circulating and a potential loss of support from certain groups and leaders in our Church may put their lives at even greater risk.

We understand that CCODP needs to do its due diligence when supporting partners overseas; this too is proper discernment. CCODP's over 50 years of work show a commitment to the Church and those who are most marginalized in their struggle for dignity. We trust that CCODP and the Canadian bishops will continue their commitment to our brothers and sisters in need, with transparency, the utmost respect,

clarity, contextualization and Christian charity which they have shown over the past decades. We expect that the criteria, the review process and its fruits will be objective and, more importantly, ever reflective of the ideals of mercy and justice to which the Gospel calls us.

As we have done in the past through Canadian Jesuits International, the Jesuits of Canada will continue to support the work of Fundacion ERIC and Radio Progreso. We are aware of the extent to which the solidarity and financial support of many other international organizations is essential if they are to properly carry out their mission. As Development and Peace focuses this year in a special way on the issue of migration and as we all witness the tragedy of the caravans of Central American migrants, mainly from Honduras, we are convinced that we must support the human rights work of Father Melo and his team.

Finally, we offer the fruits of the experience and research of our international and social centres here in Canada to help resolve this troubling situation.