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Healing the wounds of Religious Extremism in Africa Campaign

In response to the unprecedented attacks on Africa carried out by Islamic extremists, the pontifical foundation ACN International has approved aid amounting to more than twelve million AUD for Christians in Africa.

During the last few years, Christians have been targeted by Islamic extremists in many countries in Africa. Bernard Toutounji, National Director of ACN Australia, highlighted that "Tragically Africa is the continent with the highest number of murdered priests, religious and catechists. Yet despite the often catastrophic situation, Africa continues to be a continent of hope for the Catholic Church. With a total of 234 million Catholics, more than one-sixth of all Catholics worldwide live there. The faithfulness of the Catholic people in Africa is well known and has been praised by the Popes as an example and a gift. That is why ACN views its task today in supporting the African Church as so necessary."

ACN Australia has therefore launched the campaign "Healing the wounds of religious extremism in Africa" which supports several concrete measures. One of the top priorities of the African Church's mission, is the promotion of interreligious dialogue to further understanding and fraternity on all sides. Trauma healing is another measure ACN is focusing on as true peace is only possible once the trauma experienced by those deeply wounded by Islamic terrorism has been healed. "The Catholic Church in Africa is itself often one of the victims, but more than anything She is an important source of support, reconciliation and healing for all who are suffering violence. For this reason, ACN considers the aid it provides to the Church of the 'continent of martyrs' one of its most crucial missions, now more than ever," explained Dr Heine-Geldern.

To further assist in the rehabilitation of the people, ACN is sponsoring several projects focused on spiritual and psychological training. In the diocese of Maiduguri (Nigeria), the terrorist regime of Boko Haram left two thousand traumatised widows and several thousands of orphans behind in its wake. ACN has helped set up a centre for the training of trauma therapists to assist those who have been scarred by suffering.

Priests and religious sisters need assistance to live their vocations under these dangerous conditions. For this reason, ACN provides funding for spiritual retreats and training courses in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Nigeria and the Central African Republic.

Additionally, ACN helps priests earn their livelihoods through Mass stipends and helps religious by donating means of transportation and communication. This ensures that religious sisters and pastoral workers are able to provide ongoing assistance to the victims. For example, 26 religious sisters in the

diocese of Pemba in northern Mozambique are the recipients of this form of aid. They serve in a region that is one of the primary targets of Jihadist militia groups and where terrorism has already displaced more than 750,000 people from the area.

Another factor crucial to keeping the faith alive is helping parishes rebuild their churches and the religious infrastructure that has disintegrated under Islamic terrorism. In the predominantly Islamic country of Niger, for example, funds have been granted for the rebuilding of a parish church in the city of Zinder which was destroyed in 2015.

ACN President Heine-Geldern feels encouraged by Pope Francis in the work ACN is doing in Africa. "The Holy Father called for active solidarity with Africa on Easter Sunday. In particular, he prays for the people of Africa who see their future compromised by internal violence and international terrorism and places his hopes in fraternal dialogue in a spirit of reconciliation. ACN is doing everything in its power to realise the pope's mission for Africa."

To watch video's on what ACN is doing in Africa and to donate visit www.aidtochurch.org/africa

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