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Canadian Catholic aid group faces drastic funding cut

by Jerry Filteau

Since the March announcement of a 65 percent cut in government funding for the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, the nation's Catholic overseas aid agency, online donations from Canadian Catholics have grown to "more than double" the usual rate, Development and Peace spokeswoman Kelly Di Domenico told *NCR* April 16.

"We can hope and dream" that when proceeds come in from the nationwide Lenten collection March 25 in Catholic parishes, they will offset the drastic government cut, she said.

The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops said it was "extremely disappointed" with the cut. Bishops across the country urged Catholics to increase their donations in order to make up for the loss.

"For Catholics, there is a duty of justice and solidarity with our fellow human beings," the bishops of Quebec wrote in an appeal to parishioners.

In the meantime, Development and Peace is planning to work in the coming year with a budget \$5 million lower than before, Di Domenico said. (All dollar figures here are Canadian, but U.S. and Canadian dollars have been practically equal in recent months.)

Under a five-year contract from 2006 to 2011, the governmental Canadian International Development Agency provided the Catholic aid group with \$44.6 million for programs in poor countries. Last July, Development and Peace submitted a \$49.2 million funding proposal for development programs in 20 countries over the next five years, but in March the government agency agreed to provide just \$14.5 million for programs in seven of those countries.

"This reduction will have serious consequences for the poor and marginalized in many countries," said Michael Casey, Development and Peace executive director. He said it raises concerns "that the Canadian

government is changing its orientations in the field of international cooperation.?

The Catholic Register, a Canadian national newspaper, reported in an analysis March 28 that some policy experts regard the shifts in government funding for overseas aid as defunding agencies that are critical of some government policies.

The paper said the Canadian International Development Agency declined to ?discuss publicly the specifics of individual proposals? submitted to it by aid agencies. But it quoted from an agency email that funding decisions ?are determined by a variety of factors, including alignment with current thematic and geographic priorities.?

Di Domenico said traditionally about 60 percent of the Catholic organization?s funding comes from donors, and the annual Lenten appeal in parishes typically raises about \$7 million to \$8 million a year. The other major component of program funding comes from the government, she said.

To make up the nearly \$35 million gap between the Catholic organization?s funding request for the next five years and the government grant, Canadian Catholics would have to double their Lenten donations every year for the next five years.

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