

**Caritas Australia welcomes additional support for regional COVID-19 response and recovery**

Caritas Australia welcomes the government's announcement in last night's federal budget that Australia will increase economic support for COVID-19 response and recovery in our region by \$304.7 million over the next two years.

This one-off increase in support to the Pacific and Timor-Leste comes at a crucial moment, as the impacts of COVID-19 are likely to push an additional 533 million people into poverty this year, marking the first increase in global poverty rates in over twenty years.

Kirsty Robertson, CEO of Caritas Australia, said that "We have seen the devastating impacts of COVID-19 on marginalised communities that we work with, and welcome this commitment as an important step to ensure that our vulnerable neighbours are supported through this crisis."

However, Caritas Australia is deeply concerned that the government has cut aid to other countries in South and West Asia, Africa and the Middle East – countries where the current circumstances are dire.

"This means that vulnerable communities in countries like Afghanistan and Bangladesh may not receive the support they need to respond to the COVID-19 crisis," said Ms Robertson.

"COVID-19 has changed the world for everyone and our global neighbours are suffering – economically and socially - on top of already great challenges," said Ms Robertson.

Ms Robertson said Pope Francis, in the papal encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* released last weekend, called for the international community to no longer think "in terms of 'them' and 'those' but only 'us'".

"The additional support for some of Australia's most vulnerable neighbours is an important step towards this goal," said Ms Robertson. "But it is vital that these efforts are sustained, as long-term support is needed for the slow recovery from COVID-19."

Caritas Australia is a member of Caritas Internationalis, one of the world's largest humanitarian networks in the world with 169 agencies operating in over 200 countries and territories.

**Media contact:** Jessica Stone on 0490 684 867 / [jessica.stone@caritas.org.au](mailto:jessica.stone@caritas.org.au) or [caritasmedia@caritas.org.au](mailto:caritasmedia@caritas.org.au).