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MEDIA RELEASE: Australian Ambassador to the Holy See joins call to support women living in poverty

To commence its annual Women for the World campaign, Caritas Australia yesterday held an event to celebrate and honour women as leaders across the world.

Addressing the event as special guest was Her Excellency Chiara Porro, the Australian Ambassador to the Holy See, who spoke on women's leadership, the Church and the role of women in development.

"Women's empowerment and gender equality make countries more stable, less vulnerable to conflict, and, in general, better governed. If our aim is to contribute to global stability and prosperity, it therefore makes sense that gender equality and the removal of barriers to women's economic and social inclusion should be central pillars of our foreign policy in Australia," said Her Excellency, Ambassador Porro.

"Since arriving at the Holy See, women in leadership has been a key focus of my work. We've showcased trailblazing women who have shaped the history of the Catholic Church and its contribution in society and developed platforms to support emerging female leaders and promote gender equality at the highest levels."

"To truly achieve gender equality, we need leadership to role model inclusive, constructive and supportive leadership and make sure everyone's on board. Without this, real change won't come about."

Attended by new and long-term Caritas Australia supporters, the event also heard from Caritas Australia CEO Kirsty Robertson who talked about her recent experience in Ethiopia, a country currently in the grips of a food crisis, where she visited last month.

"Often, we heard stories of women in Africa getting water and looking at the water knowing it was going to make them sick, yet they drink it anyway out of necessity. A number of the women that we spoke to in IDP (Internally Displaced People) camps were also really worried about stopping and walking because if you stop, you're much more at risk of the army and the consequences of that for women, girls, and children is obviously devastating as well," said Ms Robertson.

"It's those conversations, which in some ways are tragic, but in other ways are a real reminder that the world is not fair, and that is what really motivates me and compels Caritas Australia forward."

This year alone, there are estimated to be 388 million women and girls worldwide living in extreme poverty. These women and girls face many challenges including lack of education and training, food insecurity, inadequate access to health care, gender-based violence and discrimination.

"Now, more than ever, it is important for us to band together for women and girls across the world, as they face increasing challenges from conflict, COVID-19, climate change and now the increase in food and fuel prices from the war in Ukraine," said Ms Robertson.

"There are more than 130 million girls out of school. But if all girls can finish their secondary education or equivalent, our global GDP can increase by 10 per cent over the next decade. This just shows that when we empower women and girls, really, we empower everybody."

Since 2013, Caritas Australia's dedicated Women for the World community has helped provide education, develop livelihoods and improve healthcare and protection for some of the most vulnerable women and girls in marginalised communities.

Go to <https://www.womenfortheworld.org.au/> to learn more.

Kirsty Robertson, CEO of Caritas Australia, is available for interview.

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