

# Canadian church leaders meet with Mexican aid agencies after charges

MEXICO CITY - The executive director of the Canadian Catholic bishops' aid organization has expressed confidence in the groups that receive agency funds in Mexico, even though five of those partners have been accused of promoting policies that violate church teaching.

Michael Casey, executive director of Development and Peace, said he was "not dismayed" after an initial April 16 meeting in Mexico City with the five groups that allegedly have supported the liberalization of abortion laws. But Mr. Casey also stressed that the investigation by a committee of inquiry from the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops was far from being completed and that committee members were taking the allegations against their partner agencies seriously.

"We're certainly not going to support any work that goes against Catholic teaching," Mr. Casey told Catholic News Service. "There's a real need for clarification ... because we have a lot of very concerned members."

The Canadian bishops' investigative trip to Mexico highlights a growing quandary for the church as organizations in the developing world funded by Catholic donations come under scrutiny for lacking explicit pro-life stances or simply having links - however tenuous - with other organizations that favor abortion.

"This is a very sensitive issue for the Catholic Church," Mr. Casey said.

It was sensitive enough for several Canadian bishops to say they would withhold donations collected in Development and Peace's annual Share Lent campaign and for the agency to temporarily suspend funding for the five groups in question.

It also prompted the bishops' conference to form a committee of inquiry, which traveled to Mexico April 15-18 to seek reassurances that its development organization does not fund organizations that promote liberalized abortion laws. The committee is headed by Archbishop Martin Currie of St. John's, Newfoundland, and Archbishop Francois Lapierre of Saint-Hyacinthe, Quebec.

The bishops' conference said in an April 7 press release, "Development and Peace also received written assurances from the five groups that they do not promote abortion."

The inquiry committee met in Mexico City with the five organizations that LifeSiteNews.com cited as parties to proclamations and reports that supported the April 2007 Mexico City abortion law. The law decriminalizes abortion during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy.

Mr. Casey said that part of the problem appeared to originate with various proclamations and reports, including one from the United Nations.

"Anytime you get into a big group like that, each of the individual groups have their own focus ... obviously not everybody is going to agree with everybody on everything," he said.

The question, Mr. Casey said, is "how much of that (joint) solidarity directly implicates groups in things that they don't adhere to?"

While in Mexico City, the committee also met with officials from the Mexican bishops' conference. Queries on the meeting were referred by the bishops' conference to Bishop Rodrigo Aguilar Martinez of Tehuacan. Attempts to reach the bishop were unsuccessful.

Monsignor Carlos Quintana Puente, an official with the U.S. bishops' Office of National Collections, also attended the meeting. He called the issue "delicate" and said he preferred not to comment until a later date.

Mr. Casey said that prior to the reports being published earlier this year no major issues had surfaced with the five partners.

"We do a lot of research when choosing new partners; our program officers visit here regularly," he said. "We look for partners that share the same value base ... we're very much focused on integral human development - people-oriented, community-based."

A final report from the commission of inquiry is not expected until at least the

summer.