

CRS Headquarters
Baltimore, United States of America

Dear friends of CRS,

I have been in contact with CRS for many years really. I confess that after hearing rumors about your independent approach towards the local Caritas, and local Churches, when I first participated in the General Assembly of Caritas Internationalis in 1987, I had a hesitant opinion about you.

Well, in 1993 you were celebrating your 50th anniversary, and I was “displaced” from Mogadishu to Nairobi, due to the civil war and unrest in Somalia, which caused the physical destruction of the Church and Caritas Somalia inside Somalia. By this time, I had been already in direct contact with you for two years. I remember your director for Somalia at that time, Ken Hackett. I remember also the visit of Cardinal Malone to Baidoa shortly after Christmas 1992.

My personal experience with CRS and its people has been growing at the point that from 2005 to 2008 you were even hosting our office in Nairobi, when the director of Caritas Somalia was Davide Bernocchi. I cannot enumerate all the events I took part with you and your people I have met on the field and in Baltimore. Let me also add your fraternal relations with the last directors of Caritas Somalia, Beata Biela and Maria José Alexander.

All through these years I was able to completely change the first opinion I had based on rumors. For me CRS has been not simply an important partner, but also a “big brother”, ready to assist the activities of Caritas Somalia. At certain moments you even “lent” to us some of your personnel, like Suzanna Tkalec now at Caritas Internationalis. What I have mostly appreciated has been also the fact that you have been consulting me on “Somali affairs” before taking any engagement.

You know my attitude: I’ve never wanted a “big” Caritas Somalia, mainly for prudence, in front of the magnitude of the Somali problem, and the continuous situation of emergency. I saw in you (without forgetting other partners) a “sister” Caritas ready to be the “good Samaritan” towards the Somali people, when the local Caritas was either handicapped or simply willing to remain discrete, little: you were always ready to support and to consult us.

I thank you for this attitude towards us: for me it meant a real fraternal, friendly and fruitful relationship at the service of the “least ones” (Mt 25:40) in this world.

On this your 75th anniversary, I ask the Lord to keep blessing you and inspiring you to be witnesses of his love and service towards the poor and for a more just and fraternal world.



Djibouti, 26 August 2018

Msgr. Giorgio Bertin
President of Caritas Somalia
Bishop of Djibouti
Apostolic administrator of Mogadishu