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## Msgr. Crociata (COMECE): “The European Union must not lose sight of its global responsibility”

Transparency in the procurement and distribution of vaccines in all EU countries, in the higher interest of the population as a whole, without class distinctions or exclusions; showing consideration for the weakest members of society and the poorest world countries, Africa in particular. "There is a global responsibility that cannot be ignored", write the EU bishops and Caritas Europe in a joint statement to the European Union in the current challenging vaccination stage. Msgr. Mariano Crociata, bishop of Latina and Vice-President of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community ( COMECE), commented to SIR: "COVID-19 vaccines are a dramatically topical issue of our present time, in light of the need to overcome the pandemic. This awareness calls for the adoption of an open approach, marked by cooperation between all those willing to share their knowledge and ideals." COMECE and Caritas Europe call on the European Union to promote large-scale vaccinations not only for the safety and protection of Europe, but also for global public health understood as a common public good, for the benefit also and especially of people living in the world's poorest nations. "Ensuring vaccine access for all", reads the statement, "is a global moral urgency." Bishop Crociata explained: "In an effort to fulfil its institutional role, COMECE has long felt the importance of expanding the horizons of its collaboration initiatives. *Caritas Europe's mission is to devote special care to the weakest members of the European population, with the goal of creating a fairer society, which is something we value deeply.*"



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As highlighted in the joint statement, the EU bishops and Caritas Europe call for utmost vigilance to ensure that in this delicate phase of vaccine distribution no disruptive elements may arise in the relationship between pharmaceutical companies and health institutions, and between health agencies and the population at large. Besides having confidence in the European authorities concerned, the huge amount of news, sometimes distorted, disseminated to the public opinion, can understandably fuel unjustified or overblown suspicions. Vaccine procurement and distribution must be transparent in all EU countries. In this process, careful consideration must be paid to the interests of all, avoiding class distinctions and exclusions, with due concern for the weakest members of society. To what extent could the world be even more divided into rich and poor countries after the pandemic? Do you refer to "vaccine nationalism" in your statement? What is it? Is it still conceivable to save oneself alone? There is a strong tendency to let oneself be influenced by misconceived national interests in the procurement and distribution of vaccines, and there were some early indications of concern. The present stage is the most sensitive one, as the vaccination campaigns have not yet been completed. This means that different forms of interference could leave some people behind. The vaccine issue extends beyond technical and medical aspects, since it has become a purely political question. Once again, in the face of this challenge, the European Union is being called to show that it can live up to its historic mission, which sees countries united and in agreement in confronting a common enemy. This mission involves not forgetting poor or developing countries, especially in Africa, which the EU cannot ignore or isolate itself from. There is a global

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*obligation that cannot be disregarded. 2021 is the year of the vaccine, yet there are many uncertainties. There are various types of vaccines. Variants are increasing. The efficacy of the current vaccines is unknown. Leaving aside scientific explanations, what attitude should we adopt in the face of uncertainties and challenges?* Underlying vigilant confidence in EU institutions and the scientific community is necessary. It is important to be vigilant given manifold potential pitfalls. However, this trust must not be broken, combined with sound judgement and a positive, constructive attitude. Anything will do, except causing or fuelling panic. Rather, in order to live up to its historical and geopolitical role, the European Union should not lose sight of its global mandate. Through direct intervention with the distribution of the vaccine, and acting as a mediator through diplomatic action, the European Union is responsible for the destiny of the weakest populations affected by the pandemic. The richest and most developed countries have the opportunity to engage in a successful battle against the virus across the globe. *Indeed, in a globalised world, if the pandemic is not eradicated throughout, everyone will somehow continue being exposed to this threat. A European conscience worthy of its historical responsibility is at stake.*

M. Chiara Biagioni