



# Founding Document

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## Vision

**The national and international contexts** of today are characterized by growing complexity and profound change. Multiple signs from economic, political, environmental, structural, demographic and societal orders point toward a pivotal moment in human history. While classical modes of interpretation seek to provide and ensure levels of continuity, present realities along with the speed with which change is experienced unquestionably increase the complexity of both the phenomena and the development of innovative solutions.

**National policies** are formed in a reactionary and short-term manner, seeking a security that has become a priority but which at times tends to overshadow democratic and societal principles, as well as human dignity. Social cohesion is affected, human rights are at risk of being rejected; national borders are closed with violence; there is growing propensity toward exclusion and to increase the power of national authorities. All of this adversely affects the development of the human person, weakens social balances and places the future of humanity itself in question.

**International structures** conceived in the aftermath of World War II seem to have arrived at the limits of their growth, implicitly raising fundamental questions regarding the unity required to further human development. Moreover, the necessary progress toward developing new forms of governance to strengthen the principle of the common good is impaired by shifting political powers among the nations.

**The importance of civil society** during this period of transition cannot be underestimated. For many decades civil society contributed to an overall state of well-being in encompassing a large panorama of social realities. Its continued search for dialogue, its combat against all forms of poverty, along with its safeguarding respect of the human person and his/her dignity, protecting the environment and promoting development; all remain fundamental and take on even more significance in these times of profound change.

**Catholic inspired organizations** have gained significant credibility through their contributions to social wellbeing. Their great capillarity with respect to a presence that is both geographically widespread and thematically diverse, with actions serving to both challenge and collaborate with actors and decision-making bodies, along with an inspiration drawn from the Gospel and the social teaching of the Church, have permitted these Catholic movements and organizations to bring important points to the forefront of strategic and political order. This equally explains how the concept and identity of the Forum evolved, so as to bring together diverse areas of expertise for a holistic and Catholic discourse.

## Mission

In reading the signs of the times, organizations of Catholic inspiration, according to their identity, seek to make a shared assessment of these new challenges, deepen together their analysis of the interacting factors, consider anew the question of the future of our communities, safeguard those dynamics that contribute to social cohesion, and exchange essential points of advocacy and action carried out before intergovernmental bodies.

In this sense, drawing inspiration from the Gospel and conscious of the need to actively contribute to a civilization of love, these organizations propose to create together a social observatory through the sharing of analysis and expertise, to serve as a source of innovative approaches.

The Forum will thus be a place of encounter and exchange. Through its Secretariat the Forum will develop its role as a social observatory and offer a space for analysis, reflection and exchange of expertise so as to strengthen the Catholic voice in the public debate and in its advocacy before intergovernmental bodies specifically.

## Network

The Forum functions as a network. The concept of the network is brought forth in a spirit of communion and characterizes itself by an approach that is dynamic, voluntary and non-hierarchical.

Through their respective organizations the participants of the Forum are already engaged in political advocacy before intergovernmental bodies. They have established international and even global structures. They are invited to participate in the Forum by virtue of their advocacy work before international bodies as well as because of their expertise in the various thematic issues.

The criteria of participation in the Forum serves to guarantee the quality of the encounters, the relevance of the analysis and thus the value of the thematic expertise. Participation in the Forum will remain as inclusive as possible while having three fundamental criteria:

- Effective engagement in advocacy before one or several intergovernmental institutions;
- Proven expertise in one or multiple social themes;
- Formal commitment to contribute to the network, inspired by the Gospel, Magisterium and social teaching of the Church.

Participation is voluntary but it is understood that the quality of work depends greatly upon regularity of interaction and the assiduous follow up of the objectives. The credibility of the network will be proportional to the engagement of the participants.

## Secretariat

The Forum integrates a Secretariat at the service of the network.

The Secretariat develops a transversal approach in full respect of the principle of subsidiarity. It builds upon the voluntary contribution of participants and organizations and without interfering in their decision-making and strategic planning processes.

In its relationships with participating persons and organizations, the Secretariat places itself at the service of the organizations and of that which unites them. It will not support any proposal that would seek to promote one organization above another, and fulfills its mission as facilitator of the network.

The Secretariat will regularly update the mapping analysis of the organizations and their advocacy work within the different fields of engagement; it will receive and bring together the positions taken by the organizations; establish contacts with number of experts, prepare assemblies and formulate the dynamics of the network through and with the thematic groups. A working strategy of the network will be elaborated by an ad hoc Committee and the Secretariat.

## Subsidiarity and shared responsibility

The existence and strength of the network is fundamentally dependent upon the participation of the various actors. For this, and divergent from those dynamics which constitute and animate traditional platforms, the Forum network develops on the basis of shared, rather than delegated responsibilities. Participants of the Forum are therefore not in first instance regarded as representatives of an organizational structure but rather as experts in international advocacy and political analysis.

The efforts towards creating unity and solidary commitment between the participants therefore remain in and of themselves insufficient. The commitment of the organizations to subsequently develop appropriate ways of implementing and integrating part or all of the findings and outcomes remains indeed essential.

## A thematic approach

Six major themes were previously identified from the existing work of the organizations: Human Rights, Education, Family, Development and Environment, Migration, and Health.

These themes constitute an initial basis from which to work, without acting to limit other possible useful initiatives of encounter and thematic exchange. The Secretariat will follow the initiatives to ensure effective thematic organization.

Thematic groups will gather in the time periods between the Forum assemblies. They will establish their agenda, initiatives of formation and a working methodology. The Secretariat will be kept informed on progress and goals. Existing thematic platforms are equally invited to contribute to the network and to share their outcomes and expertise.

Each thematic group is asked to identify an expert to participate in multidisciplinary meetings organized by the Secretariat. These interdisciplinary meetings will contribute to a more holistic analysis by bringing together diverse approaches and will contribute to develop the Forum's function

as a social observatory. This multidisciplinary committee of experts will meet at least two times per year.

## **A geographic approach**

In an effort to pursue a broad and cohesive approach, the Forum intends to include the outcomes and findings of all existing Catholic inspired platforms interacting with intergovernmental institutions, while fully respecting their particular agendas.

## **A creative and strategic approach**

The network seeks to develop new modes of solidarity beyond those pursued by the various organizations themselves. This should allow for the development of innovative pathways, vision and analysis that are less limited by financial constraints, obligations toward donors or other existing organizational challenges.

The network will thus facilitate initiative and creative strategic thinking.

All analysis, discourse, proposals or conclusions will be sent to the organizations for their decision as to the follow-up they may subsequently choose to develop.

## **Enrichment of the participating organizations**

This approach does not detract from organizational autonomy but intends to enrich the participating organizations. It leads to new dynamics and permits the development of new forms of solidarity. It favors analysis, the comprehension of interacting challenges and increases strategic potential.

It also allows for the participation of each of the various types of Catholic inspired organizations, without regard to their financial or structural status. The basis of interaction rests upon those qualities specific to the themes of engagement and advocacy before intergovernmental bodies. This interaction has formational value as well as serving to enrich each participating organization.

The thematic groups and existing platforms will see the results of their actions and reflections incorporated into a broader scope meant to reinforce the value of their own organizational work, engagement and positions.

## **A strengthened voice**

Gathering solutions and expertise will allow for a more comprehensive analysis, reinforce positions and serve to better highlight the Church's action in the various social arenas.

The more streamlined communication efforts among the network actors and with the relevant episcopal structures and the concerned Episcopal Assemblies, and the H. See (the Permanent Representatives of the Holy See to International organizations, and the Dicasteries of the Curia Romana) will further contribute to strengthen the global voice of the Church in its service and commitment to humanity, promoting the integral development of all persons.

## Toward continual collaboration

A networking strategy will be formulated. This strategy will draw inspiration from the contributions and approaches of the participating persons and organizations, and take full advantage of the various means of communication at its disposal.

The Committee of Forum International

Alfred Fernandez

Daniel Guéry

Maria Hildingsson

Johan Ketelers

Michel Roy

Giampaolo Silvestri