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Doctors and the Challenge of Poverty

BARCELONA, Spain, MARCH 19, 2006 (Zenit.org).- An international gathering of Catholic physicians will focus on the theme "Catholic Doctors and the Challenge of Poverty in the Era of Globalization," and discuss missionary medicine.

This will be the topic of the 22nd Congress of the International Federation of Catholic Medical Associations (FIAMC), which will be held May 11-14 in Barcelona.

In this interview with ZENIT, Dr. José Simón, president of the local organizing committee, discusses the upcoming congress.

Q: What are FIAMC's objectives?

Simón: The objectives of FIAMC are to coordinate the activities of the associations of the various countries -- some are very large and strong -- to promote the existence of associations where there are none, to collaborate in the development of the medical profession from the perspective of Christian humanism, to foment knowledge of medical ethics and to develop projects of international cooperation in the sense pointed out by Benedict XVI in his encyclical.

"Caritas" is a mission proper to the Church, together with the sacraments and the word of God.

One of the most genuinely medical forms of working as a team is the development of congresses. In the 22nd international congress, which in addition will be supported by seven parallel symposiums and a great exposition of missionary medicine, we hope that those attending will be formed, establish ties among themselves, pray together and return to their countries of origin with new energies to address the everyday challenges. To date, 500 doctors have registered, but we are expecting many more.

This time will be the first that a great exposition of missionary medicine is held. There is always an exposition in congresses, but this time we will have some 50 expositions, some of them very beautiful. We will show the world how much the Church does for the sick.

Where medicine is not a business, as in black Africa, it is the Church -- and our brothers of other Churches -- who take care of the sick. This is especially significant in the case of AIDS.

Q: This 22nd international congress of FIAMC is being held "in honor and gratitude" to Pope John Paul II, yes?

Simón: The congress is held in honor and gratitude to Pope John Paul II because of the special link that his pontificate had with medical science, and because of his courageous defense of all human life, even if incipient.

FIAMC edited a CD with all of John Paul II's magisterium on life and medicine. He always received us whenever we requested it. I remember very well the audience during the congress on the persistent vegetative state, which FIAMC held with the Pontifical Academy for Life.

Q: Why is it considered important that this congress address "the challenge of poverty in the era of globalization" from the point of view of Catholic doctors? Do you think they can act on the causes of the problem and not only tackle its consequences?

Simón: Poverty is one of the scourges of humanity. We, the associations of Catholic doctors can and must and already do work in the following areas to struggle against poverty in health: Telemedicine, e-learning,

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microcredits in health care, missionary medicine -- which the Church has been doing since the beginning -- and education in values.

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Q: What are the globalized poverties that medicine addresses? Is the embryo or fetus the planet's poorest person today?

Simón: Medicine addresses malnutrition, malaria, AIDS, mothers who give birth without medical care. A preferential option -- not exclusive or excluding, however -- of FIAMC is the option for mothers and, consequently, the option for the poorest of the poor, the human embryos without a family to accept them.

Q: Spain, host country of the congress, opens its doors with the novelties of the Law of Techniques of Assisted Human Reproduction, whose lack of ethics envelops it in controversy. What repercussion will this aspect have on the next meeting of doctors from all over the world?

Simón: Spain is in a difficult situation on the topics of life and family. I hope that the congress will also help Spaniards to see what is right and what is wrong, and to correct what is wrong.

Barcelona will go all out to see that the event is a success. Her Majesty, Queen Sofía of Spain, will preside over the congress's Committee of Honor.

Also on it is Cardinal Lozano Barragán, president of the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers; Bishop Elio Sgreccia, president of the Pontifical Academy for Life; Joaquín Navarro Valls, Vatican spokesman; Cardinal Julián Herranz, who is a doctor; Cardinal Renato Martino, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and for Migrants and Travelers, who will give the opening address.

Q: In a message on March 1 Bishop César Ortega of Barcelona congratulated FIAMC for the profoundly social and Christian sense it is giving this congress.

Simón: The archbishop has enthusiastically supported the congress and expects much from it. He will address a few words to us and will follow the sessions attentively.

Moreover, the liturgies will be very beautiful. One of the Masses will be in the Catholic Byzantine rite, as a sign of the universality and respect for the 50 Ukrainian doctors who will attend.



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