

Talks backed by aid key to defusing North Korea crisis

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For several years, Caritas has been providing humanitarian assistance to the poorest in North Korea.

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Caritas says alleviating the acute suffering of the poor in North Korea (DPRK) rather than military action must be key component to ending the current crisis.

Caritas Internationalis members from Asia, North America and Europe met in China last week to discuss the situation on the Korea peninsula amid growing tensions there.

UN sanctions have been imposed on North Korea after the government in Pyongyang conducted nuclear weapon tests and vowed to strengthen its arms programme.

Caritas is calling for denuclearisation of the region if peaceful development is to be sustained.

Caritas is urging for peace talks with practical solutions for vulnerable North Koreans as the best way to prevent any escalation into military action. Caritas says resorting to armed confrontation will have devastating consequences for the poor in North Korea and destabilise

the region.

The humanitarian crisis in North Korea is still present. At least 8.7 million people in North Korea need food assistance (out of a population of 23 million). The number actually receiving aid is much lower and aid is being cut further due to lack of funding. In many areas, health and education infrastructure is close to collapse.

Caritas Internationalis Secretary-General Lesley-Anne Knight was at the Beijing meeting. She said, "Armed intervention in response to North Korea's belligerent actions will only cause further human tragedy and compound the suffering of the people there.

"Genuine negotiations with concrete outcomes for improving the daily living conditions of the people are vital steps in reducing the suffering and engaging with North Korea to find a solution to this crisis.

"The desperate situation many North Koreans find themselves needs addressing by the international community. A major part of the population is highly vulnerable, living in a precarious state where basic needs are not met. They should not be the victims of their government's provocations."

Caritas is giving priority through its programmes to children, women and older people who are the most affected.

For several years, Caritas has been providing humanitarian assistance to the poorest in North Korea. It will continue to mobilise support and implement effective programmes in the areas of food distribution, health and education, together with local and regional partners. The global Caritas network works through its member, Caritas Korea, in coordinating all activities.

Caritas sees humanitarian aid to the people of North Korea as a critical part of a long-term engagement with the country. Caritas has a vital role to play and invites other international organisations and Church initiatives to join efforts to assist the people of North Korea.

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