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Presentation of the AIC

by Patricia P. de Nava
AIC International President
18.VII.2002

1. Definition

The AIC is an association of whom the majority are women. It was inspired by their founder, Vincent de Paul, who was the first to officially confide the important role of service of the poorest of the poor to women.

In more than 50 countries, thanks to local teams of volunteers, the AIC is working in solidarity and proximity with the most abandoned so they can become agents of their own development as well as that of their communities.

In a special way, the AIC accompanies women in their promotion and search for autonomy. The AIC opposes injustices and puts pressure on structures, as well as persons with power, to fight against the causes of poverty.

In order to attain its objective, the AIC fosters the bond and interdependence between local and international levels. In civil organizations, it participates in a worldwide network that tries to combine and link the efforts of public and private organizations that are involved in the fight against poverty and exclusion so as to defend the rights of the poorest of the poor.

2. Vision

The AIC offers its service to:

- Be a transforming force in society and to fight against poverty;
- Have a priority commitment to women throughout the world;
- Strengthen involvement with the poor;
- Foster collaboration and networking and, conscious of everyone's responsibility, participate in public political activities.

3. Values

Ethical values, in light of the gospel, inspire its activity. Above all, the AIC works to promote justice, equality, a place in society, tolerance, respect and dignity of the person and the right to participate in his or her own destiny.

4. Strategic Objective

To act together against poverty and its causes

This is a commitment to put the lines of action into practice:

- To be a transforming force in the face of poverty;
- To be a transforming force in society;
- To be a transforming force in the Association.

In imitation of St. Vincent de Paul, the AIC fosters working together with the poor in concrete projects to fight poverty and its causes and to defend their rights.

5. The essential principles that animate the AIC are:

- To work together to fight poverty and injustice;
- To consider the human being as a whole person;
- To respect his or her cultural identity;
- To consider, as a priority, promotion of the human person;
- To know the economic, political, social and religious realities of each community or group.

*The AIC commits us to be prophets, to give witness,
to announce and to denounce!*

These criteria lead the volunteers of AIC to:

- Assure the Vincentian presence in the world, preserving their own identity and giving witness;
- Be present as a crucial force proclaiming Christian, ethical and social values;
- Be present as a prophetic force giving a religious dimension to human and civil actions;
- Permeate these actions with evangelical values.

The AIC establishes networks to create projects that can transform the lives of the poor, such as:

- Housing for single women in Cologne, Germany;
- Service for people in the terminal stages of AIDS in Madrid, Spain;
- A house for people who are terminally ill in Mexico;
- A community development and savings project in Payatas (Philippines).

The AIC is enthusiastically working on the campaign: “The Fight Against Hunger: The Globalization of Charity.” This is a common project within the principal branches of the Vincentian Family in many countries throughout the world.

6. The strength of the AIC:

- Does not flow from our resources, which are often limited, but rather from the Christian, ethical and moral strength of our questioning;
- Comes, above all, from the influence that this has in the lives of the poor and in the transformation of their lives;
- Our Vincentian charism is distinctive and enables us to be closer to the poor, our brothers and sisters.

Unity is our strength

The “World Decade for the Eradication of Poverty,” promoted by the UN, asks that various types of collaboration and networks be developed seeking the same goal. The projects will be more effective if we collaborate:

- With other branches of the Vincentian Family, especially the Priests of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity,
- With other associations and groups,
- With people at the local, national and international levels,
- With businesses and institutions,
- With mass media.

United, we can respond to the cries of the poor and, with them, improve the quality of their lives.

7. Considerations

Examination of the Association

a. The AIC and its revitalization process

Every association and every group that desires to survive over time and have an impact on society must carry out a continuous process of:

- Reflection,
- Analysis,
- Evaluation,
- Planning and suggestions.

Through an ongoing effort, the AIC constantly undergoes various processes of innovation and renovation.

b. Innovation

Those in charge, as well as volunteers, foster creativity and inventiveness. This can be seen within the innovative lines of action and documents that are developed. The advances made in relation to utilization and means of social communication are invaluable.

c. Ongoing renewal

The AIC is in an ongoing phase of renewal. It has undertaken a process of **Institutional Strengthening** in order to renew its methods of adapting to current needs and the evolution of poverty.

d. Growth

Thanks to the support from the Priests of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity throughout these last years, the AIC has implanted itself in several countries, especially those suffering many difficulties, such as in Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe. One example is its expansion to Cuba, where we currently have more than 12 groups. Just as importantly is the creation of AIC groups in countries where Catholics are in a minority, such as Japan.

The AIC is in a continuous process of dialogue, analysis, reflection and action. We believe that the association has renewed itself:

- Thanks to the evaluation process that helped us discover the need to renew ourselves;
- Through a serious commitment to put into practice the plans for renewal which came out of the process of institutional strengthening: plans of action, timelines, and new proposals for the function of the leadership committee;
- Through the leaders' encouragement for formation in order to revitalize their foundational project and adapt it to the needs of the poor of today.

e. Phases of renovation for the AIC

- **Awareness:** The AIC fosters among its leaders, as well as among its members, the desire of constantly doing more, the need to evaluate not only the quality, but also the quantity and to examine each of its undertakings.

This idea has not yet been accepted or put into practice by most of the National Associations.

- **Discovery:** brought about through formation:
 - Spiritual and Vincentian;
 - Technical and specific for each type of service given:
 - To defend human rights;
 - To utilize means of social communication;
 - For the promotion and participation of the recipients in forming their own destiny;
 - For understanding and adaptation to different cultures.

- **Creation:** We are trying to renew the structure of AIC, thanks to:
 - An Organizational chart,
 - An institutional document,
 - A plan of action,
 - A list of job descriptions and responsibilities of the Leadership Committee.

- **Contemplation:** We have always had a concern for the spiritual renewal of volunteers in line with the Social Doctrine of the Church.

Updating the main themes of our Founder is a constant worry. One of our greatest challenges consists in finding a fair balance between spiritual and technical formation specific to groups, within a process of continual updating.

f. Principal difficulties

- Renewal of group members;
 - Fewer recruits for our greater commitments;
 - Lack of interest of some Advisors for group process, only giving importance to discussions of spirituality;
 - Lack of a Vincentian Advisor, Priest of the Mission or a sister in a good number of AIC groups;
 - Advisors who carry out their mission more by obedience than by conviction;
 - Lack of participation in planning.
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- **“Feedback”**

The administration of the AIC comes together four times a year to discuss the problems, successes and failures of the Association. We count on the

presence of our International Advisors who support us in the reflection process.

Most of the AIC groups have monthly, bimonthly or weekly meetings, but many of them do not consistently evaluate their projects, activities and initiatives.

The role of the Advisor is fundamental for “feedback” within AIC groups.

- **Councillor or mentor**

Formation of leaders is one of the most urgent needs of the Association as there exists a great void with the volunteers as well as with the recipients. From this comes the need for formation with the support of the Advisors. This is a priority for the AIC.

- **Leadership**

- The strengthening of leaders will be one of the fundamental and central themes of our next International Assembly.
- Through this strengthening, the AIC tries to dispel questions that create fear in weaker groups.
- Strengthening each agent is indispensable for strengthening society.

Social co-responsibility is a pathway to peace.

The AIC invites us to be a sign of hope and a transforming force in the face of poverty in society!

(Translation: TRANSLATION CENTER – DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY, Paris)