

International Association of Charities (AIC)

“Against Poverty, Acting Together”



It was in Châtillon-les-Dombes, a small village near Maçon, in France, that St. Vincent created in 1617 the first “Confraternities,” later called “Charities.” A Sunday of August, during a homily in the church, Vincent de Paul exhorted his parishioners to

help a large, poor and sick family. Many of them, mainly women, rushed to help this family, but their generosity was not very effective, through lack of method. That is why St. Vincent was led to “organize charity.” So was born the first nucleus, the first charity, from which stem a great number of groups. The latter, while St. Vincent was still alive, spread, thanks to the Daughters of Charity and the Priests of the Mission, first to the whole of France, later to Italy in 1634 and to Poland in 1651. St. Vincent was the first one to give women a place in the Church and an active and recognized social role, in a spirit of solidarity. St. Louise de Marillac was his closest collaborator and animator of the Charities.

AIC, International Association of Charities, stems from those groups of women. *AIC has been international since its foundation, because St. Vincent wanted to create groups in Italy and Poland. As the years went by, the groups went on spreading to many other countries.*

Charities began their action with home visits, but, when he realized how diversified were the needs of the poor, St. Vincent urged them to make distinct projects, such as taking care of orphans, imprisoned deserters, the sick in the hospitals.

Traditionally, the president of the “Confraternities” of France, became the International President and the member associations, autonomous as far as the types and forms of actions were concerned, were registered at the center in Paris, situated on Rue de Sèvres.

From the beginning, they have remained united by a common spirituality that has always animated them. In 1971, for the first time, a Council and an International President were elected and existing national associations gathered under the name of “International Association of Charities,” founded by St. Vincent de Paul, with the following motto: **“Against poverty, acting together.”**

AIC Today: Vision, Spirit and Objectives

AIC is an International Non-Governmental Organization (INGO), which is composed mainly of women, organized at world level, with more than 250.000 volunteers, in more than 50 countries, on four continents. AIC harnesses energy and develops social co-responsibility around an innovative project, inspired by St. Vincent’s doctrine and teachings, firmly fixed in local reality, making disadvantaged people and those excluded from society partners of their own social reintegration.

Its fundamental project: *“To be a transforming force against poverties and in society”* broaches diverse aspects:

- To fight all forms of poverty, injustice and social exclusion, through initiatives, which give priority to solidarity and being alongside people at grass roots level.
- To maintain the Vincentian spirit and direct contact with the poorest of the poor, both through home visits and each action and project.
- To be involved first and foremost with women throughout the world, helping them help themselves.
- To increase the participation of disadvantaged people so that they become agents of their own development and that of their community.
- To encourage networking and collaboration at all levels, particularly with the Vincentian Family.
- To be a transforming force in society, by being aware of the social co-responsibility of all parties, from international authorities to local teams and disadvantaged people.

Its concrete role:

- To be present in the field. The teams are made up solely of local volunteers, responding to the needs expressed in their communities by disadvantaged people. These teams initiate projects based on local reality, enabling the poorest of the poor to draw up projects, and implement their own projects.

- To heighten public awareness to the growing problems of social exclusion. It does this by questioning local, national and international civil and Church authorities about human rights violations, the problems, needs and aspirations of excluded people, of women and of the family in today's society.
- To train volunteers in spiritual values and the Vincentian spirit.
- To develop their skills by emphasizing the multidimensionality of the causes and effects of poverty, the participation and **empowerment of the beneficiaries, partnership, social co-responsibility and networking** (2002-2006 AIC Operational Guidelines).

AIC with the International Authorities

Aware of the importance of its representativeness (250.000 volunteers) and of its experience in the fight against poverty, AIC ensures an active presence with the following international authorities: UNESCO, ECOSOC (Economical and Social Council of the United Nations), Council of Europe, Conference of the ICO (International Catholic Organizations), EAPN (European Anti-Poverty Network), Crescendo (Network for a human and Christian ageing).

The AIC representatives' mission is to transmit grassroots experience to international organisms and to inform AIC about the main themes of interest concerning eradication of poverty and its causes. In the name of AIC, the representatives consider international policies towards the poorest of the poor, and particularly excluded women, as key priorities.

Apostolic commitments and main actions and projects of AIC associations in the world:

- 8976 projects involving being alongside people and accompanying them.
- 2493 projects of social inclusion or reintegration.
- 2460 projects to develop the community.
- 1841 projects with the elderly.
- 1694 projects for the personal development of women.
- 969 projects to improve health.
- 921 projects of welcome and support.
- 527 educational and training projects.

- 443 projects with migrants.
- 429 food and nutritional projects.
- 427 projects of economic activity to generate income.
- Participation in common projects of the Vincentian Family to fight hunger and malaria.

In all these projects, AIC commits itself in transmitting the Gospel values, as St. Vincent did, and by being alongside the poorest and visiting them at home, tries to become a tangible sign of the love of Jesus Christ towards the poorest and to make God's plan reality.

AIC in the World

- **Africa and Madagascar:** Cameroon, Congo Brazzaville, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Madagascar, Mozambique, Nigeria.
- **Latin America:** Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Curaçao, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Venezuela.
- **Asia:** Indonesia, Japan, Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, Vietnam.
- **United States.**
- **Europe/Near East:** Belgium, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lebanon, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, Switzerland, Syria, Ukraine, United Kingdom.

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