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Meeting in Dhakar of the Managing Board of the John Paul II Foundation for the Sahel

Vatican City, 7 March 2016 – The Managing Board of the John Paul II Foundation for the Sahel will hold its annual meeting from 7 to 11 March in Dhakar, Senegal, to examine projects awaiting funding, alongside other matters. During 2015 there were 91 projects already funded, with a total value of almost a million dollars.

The Foundation, entrusted since its institution in 1984 to the Pontifical Council "Cor Unum", with special collaboration from the Italian Episcopal Conference, the German Bishops' Conference and local communities, carries out on behalf of the Holy Father a series of projects to assist the countries in this zone (Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal and Chad). These consist of projects against desertification, in defence of the environment, for the management and development of agricultural units, the installation of water pumps, the improvement of drinking water, and for renewable energy. The Foundation is engaged in training specialised technical staff in the countries, and over the years it has also become a tool for interreligious dialogue, given that the majority of its beneficiaries are Muslims.

In a communiqué issued today, "Cor Unum" reports that the Human Development Index of 2015 shows that among the 20 least development countries in the world, 17 are in Africa and seven are found in the Sahel, one of the poorest regions on the planet. It is estimated that in the Sahel, where there are 100 million inhabitants, 25 million live in conditions of extreme nutritional precariousness, while six million children below the age of 5 suffer from malnutrition. One of the main problems is the exhaustion of natural resources: for instance, Lake Chad, the basin aquifer that borders with Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger and Chad, and meets the needs of two and a half million people, has reduced by 80 per cent over the last fifty years. The Sahel region is also devastated by terrorist groups who have transformed it into a training zone for guerillas and subject the population to constant violence.

The Dhakar meeting, in which the Secretary of "Cor Unum", Msgr. Giampietro Dal Toso will participate as Holy See Observer, will also be attended by the following members of the Managing Board: Bishop Lucas Kalfa Sanou of Banfora, Burkina Faso, president of the Managing Board; Bishop Paul Abel Mamba of Ziguinchor, Senegal, deputy president; Bishop Ambroise Ouédraogo of Maradi, Niger; Cardinal Arlindo Gomes Furtado, bishop of Santiago of Cabo Verde, Cabo Verde; Bishop Edmond Djitangar of Sarh, Chad; Bishop Robert Patrick Elison of Banjul, Gambia; Bishop Carlos Pedro Zilli of Bafata, Guinea Bissau; and Bishop Augustin Traore of Segou, Mali.

Since 2014, there have been almost 3,100 projects funded by the Foundation John Paul II for the Sahel, for a total of more than 36 million dollars.
