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January 2016 | NEWS FROM KOLPING INTERNATIONAL

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International News

Dear Kolping Sisters and Brothers,
Dear Friends of KOLPING INTERNATIONAL,

There is no sign of any Christmas break. The International News at the beginning of the year are full of reports from around the world that illustrate that there is always much to do for people who are not indifferent to their communities and their environment. Be it the many hundreds of Kolping members in Germany, Austria, and Hungary, who are getting involved with the incoming refugees, or the full-time staff in Rwanda who organize workshops for better farming methods in agriculture. Be it the Kolping leaders in Peru who are thinking about how to do more for the preservation of the environment, or the staff at the Head Office who are accompanying projects around the world and campaign for donations to secure their funding. These International News are about all those who make their contribution in the tradition of Fr. Kolping to make the world a fairer and more livable place all around the world. They invite us to do the same and to participate.

Treu Kolping
Your Markus Demele

International

20 years Association of development-political non-government organizations (NGOs)

VENRO, i.e. the association of development-political NGOs, was 20 years old on December 19, 2015. The anniversary event was attended by, among others, the German Development Minister, Dr. Gerd Müller, and the Deputy President of the Bundestag (Lower House of the German Parliament), Claudia Roth. "The refugee situation, the climate change, and the global conflicts show that we can no longer look at the problems in isolation. Everything is interconnected," said Dr. Bernd Bornhorst, executive chairman of VENRO. "It has always been the key concern of development policies to reduce unjust structures and to make a fair distribution of life chances possible. VENRO will continue to stand for this goal in the future."

VENRO was founded on December 19, 1995. The International Kolping Society was there as a founding member right from the start. Today the association has 124 member organizations from the areas of private and church-related development cooperation, humanitarian aid, as well as development-political education, public relations, and lobbying work.

Kolping International is represented in various VENRO task forces and thus participates in the accumulating of the civil society's expertise on development-political issues.

"Since its foundation, VENRO has developed into a respected and reliable mouth-piece of the development-political civil society," said Bornhorst at the anniversary celebration, which took place in Berlin on December 16. This assessment is shared by Claudia Roth, the Deputy President of the Bundestag. Without VENRO, the German civil society would have less expertise

and solidarity. VENRO will also be needed over the next twenty years. In his speech, the German Development Minister Gerd Müller noted the need for a strong civil society which moves forward courageously and shows the way to the politicians. General Secretary Dr. Markus Demele attended the annual meeting for Kolping International.

International

Fund-raiser seal for Kolping reassures donors

Nearly three million Euros are donated to Kolping International by individuals and institutions every year. Many donors do without presents for their birthdays or wedding anniversaries and instead ask for donations to support people in Africa, Latin America, or Asia through Kolping self-help projects. In order to give all donors the assurance that all their donations are spent according to their wishes and that the advertising and administrative costs are kept in a reasonable proportion to the total expenditures, Kolping International's specific department for its development –political work, the SEK e.V., comprehensively documents its business policies to the German Central Institute for social issues and has received the so-called DZI-seal every year. This seal is awarded only to organizations that can prove an "appropriate, frugal, and efficient use of the donated funds", as well as providing a "precise and transparent rendering of accounts and full business reports." With Kolping the donors have had this security since the mid-1990s – and this will not change in the future.

Europe

Youth between hope and resignation

The Youth officer for Europe's Kolping Youth, Patrycja Kwapik, reported on the situation of young people in Europe and gave an account on what the "Kolping Youth of Europe" can offer young people. The Kolping Youth of Europe unites young people in 20 countries. But the situations of young people are very different, depending on what country they live in. In Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovenia, for instance, which are countries that have been members of the European Union for some time, every-day life is quite different from what it is in countries such as Albania, Serbia, the Kosovo, or in Moldavia. Here the general standard of living and career prospects are often worse.

The Kolping Youth attempts in these countries to encourage young people to participate, so that they can have more influence on the life in their local society. Trans-national meetings, youth exchanges, holiday camps, and workshops on international political issues connect the young people and help them to express themselves. "Our internationality helps us to strengthen the links between the young people and also raise awareness for different cultures", says Kwapik. Thus the Kolping Youth of Europe intensified the connection between Kolping youths from Albania, the Kosovo, Croatia, and Serbia through regular meetings and exchanges.

Due to the war situation in the Ukraine, things are particularly difficult for the young people there, says Patrycja Kwapik. The youths there want to find out more about democracy and often take part in political events. Kolping offers these training courses and thereby works towards a peaceful co-existence.

Poland

Active seniors work for more citizen participation

The Kolping Society of Poland is an Association that is very active and committed with projects in many societal areas. In recent years, the work for and with seniors is of growing significance. These seniors want to become influential over what happens in their communities and want to create a senior-friendly environment for themselves and for others.

Many seniors are active in the Polish Kolping Families. In December, 52 of them met in Krakow for a conference of their own. The main objective of this meeting was the civic participation of seniors in Poland. During the conference the participants talked about the new role and the societal power of this group, and about the challenges and problems of the elderly in the country.

The meeting offered a good opportunity to exchange experiences between the senior Kolping members from different regions of the country. One important finding was that the participants became aware of how much influence they can gain.

The Conference for Kolping Seniors was organized by Kolping Poland and took place in context with the project "Senior-friendly civic participation" – a topic that plays an increasingly important role in many European countries.

Germany

Kolping continues helping refugees

The new co-ordinator for the project "Refugees and immigrants", Samantha Ruppel, has started her job as of January 11, 2016. She is the contact person for Diocesan Kolping Societies and Kolping Families who are involved with refugee work. She gathers information, accompanies the content-related work with refugees within the Association, and provides informative material, courses and up-grading education. The Kolping Society of Germany thereby provides an excellent service for the other associational levels that are involved with the incoming refugees. Thus a sign is set against racist slogans. In addition, a special edition of the leadership magazine "Idea and Action" was published in January. This 36-page booklet is dealing specifically with the topic "Refugee Aid" and therefore provides good information for the local Kolping work.

Germany

Work camps: Exchange, encounters, and inter-cultural learning with tradition

The Kolping Society of Germany has presented its new 2016 catalogue containing the programs for the new year. But what are work camps all about? In a group of like-minded people, a young person experiences another country and another culture while working together with the local people on a social or environmental project, shares their everyday lives, and has also lots of fun.

Living together in a foreign culture makes it possible to get to know the country from the inside. Here one does not get just a superficial impression like package tourists do. By sharing the joy and, of course, also the problems and concerns one finds out why some things are indeed different in other places.

Moreover, by supporting a charitable project one demonstrates solidarity with the people who benefit from the project and their concerns. At the same time, one gets to know much about backgrounds, traditions, and lifestyles.

Here Kolping offers young people the experience of internationality and the diversity of cultures – that is Kolping, too!

Ecuador

Kolping – a life project

"Juventud Kolping Activa – JUKEA 2015", the national Kolping Youth Camp took place in Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas under the motto "Kolping – a life project". 90 Kolping youths from Chimborazo, Santo Domingo, and Manabi took part in it. The main content of this event was the playful approach to issues such as "What is my personal life project?", "How do I make decisions?", and self-worth.

Through various methods, the young people gained the courage to exchange opinions. Even though they came from the most diverse regions of the country, there was an open and trusting atmosphere. The days spent together in the spirit of Fr. Kolping have brought them important insights for their future lives.

Colombia

Novena calls for the protection of the environment

In Latin America, the "Novena de Aguinaldos" (Christmas novena) is an integral Catholic tradition in Advent. Nine days before Christmas, people begin to commemorate the arrival of the Christ Child with prayers and carols. One gathers with the family and friends at home around the nativity set and prays and sings. At the end, there is usually a common get-together. For this occasion, Kolping Colombia creates a special brochure every year, so that the Kolping Families can celebrate the novena together. This year's brochure was formulated by the youths of the Kolping Family "Tras las huellas de Dios" (on the footsteps of God) in Padilla/Tolima. This novena is very eco-political, because the youths have formulated a reflection for every day which invites to do something to protect the environment and calls on the members to lead the way with a good example. Just how current this novena is can be seen at the UN summit in Paris, where the governments are trying to ratify a joint declaration.

Kolping Colombia thus takes up the stimulus of Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato Si*. The "common house" of Mother Earth is to be penetrated in prayer – protecting the environment and preserving Creation thereby attain a spiritual depth which can guide our actions for the environment: Fr. Kolping would be thrilled.

Argentina

Kolping members elected to political offices

One of the Kolping Society's objectives is to strengthen the civil society, and doing so world-wide. Politicians everywhere are to be motivated to make decisions that benefit the common good. But changes can be brought about even better if one has political power and can participate directly in the decision-making processes. This is why Kolping Families around the world empower and strengthen their members so that they can be elected to public office and thus co-shape their given societies. In the Argentinian elections, six Kolping members have now been elected into public office: one as a Member of Parliament, two as mayors, and three as city councilors.

We congratulate them and are pleased that they will be putting policies in place that will benefit the people. At Kolping, in the tradition of the Catholic Social Teachings and in the spirit of the Gospel, one gets to know the values that make a good life possible for all but especially for those who have been marginalized.

Peru

Association and projects made fit for the future

At the national leadership meeting in Bambamarca, there were two key topics on the agenda. On the one hand, discussions were held as to how the life and work of Blessed Fr. Kolping can be an example for the commitment of Kolping members even today. The participants identified in a special way Fr. Kolping's fundamental values as well as his perseverance in the commitment to the community and particularly for young people threatened by exploitation.

Another topic was the protection of the environment. The commitment against waste of water and the need to recycle more waste products were key messages of this part of the seminar. Moreover, it was stressed that it is better to use biological rather than industrial fertilizers on the farms.

The individual regional Associations reported about their experiences with the new micro-finance system, which Kolping Peru has also introduced recently in the form of saving-groups. Thus the project work is being supplemented by another important pillar.

Rwanda

Steady growth in quality and quantity

2015 was a good year for Rwanda. This is being determined retrospectively by the Managing Director of Kolping Rwanda, Dancille Mujawamariya, together with the President Severin Nyiribakwe and the National Praeses Fr. Festus Nzeyimana. At year's end, the Association had close to 2000 members. That is over ten percent more than last year. To apply for membership in a Kolping Family is very attractive in view of the programs that the Association offers. There are seminars on Christian spirituality as well as courses towards increased agricultural productivity. Cows and goats improve the income situation sustainably, and the community of the Kolping Family provides support and enjoyment. However, those who want to become a member must also play an active part in the community – to just benefit from the projects is not enough. Only someone who is willing to become actively involved in the Association can become a member of Kolping Rwanda. This makes sustainability in a vibrant organization in the middle of Africa possible.

Sri Lanka

The re-construction continues

The devastating tsunami of 2004, which has cost the lives of thousands of people and destroyed the livelihoods of many more, remains unforgotten. In late 2015 General Praeses Msgr. Ottmar Dillenburger visited the Kolping members and heard

directly about the local concerns and challenges. In the Diocesan Kolping Societies Mannar, Batticaloa, Kandy, Ratnapura, and Colombo, Kolping Families work in various projects – among others in the area of agriculture. The General Praeses was also received by the bishops of several dioceses and heard the desire to intensify the Kolping work and the accompaniment of the Kolping Families in the regions. Even more than ten years after the tsunami, many of the former small farmers do not have sufficient means to increase their livestock and to feed their families sustainably. Together with church leaders, Kolping will strengthen the powers of the Kolping Society in order to make an independent life possible for more people.