

**SJES ANNUAL MEETING**  
**CONFERENCE SOCIAL SECRETARIES AND GIAN LEADERS**  
Rome, 4 June 2025

I want to focus my intervention on three issues, which to me are important:

- ✓ the first is to consider the work of the secretaries of social justice and ecology (or their corresponding functions in the Conferences of Major Superiors, in the Provinces and Regions);
- ✓ The second is the urgent need to strengthen the social apostolate and make the difficult commitment to defending and deepening democracy at all levels, on all continents, and in the world system.
- ✓ Thirdly, I would like to discuss the need to consolidate the social dimension, the commitment of all the society's apostolates to the transformation of social injustices, without risking the disappearance of works and centers of the social apostolate.

**First - On the role of social and ecological secretaries/delegates**

The struggle for social justice, which includes integral ecology, is a constitutive part of our mission, since it is a demand of Faith in Christ Jesus. A "*mission of reconciliation and justice*" is the expression that GC 36 found most adequate to describe its actuality, because justice "*is part of the reconciliation of people demanded by the reconciliation of themselves with God*", as GC 32 already said 50 years ago (GC 32, D4,2).

The secretaries of social justice and ecology (with the names given to them in each apostolic unit) are at the service of this mission in ALL apostolic works. They cannot be satisfied to be secretaries for one sector or type of apostolic work, the so-called "social works"; but they are called to assist the Major Superiors in the integral realization of the Society's mission: a mission of reconciliation and justice, oriented by the four Universal Apostolic Preferences, to which every apostolate contributes: educational, pastoral, spirituality, the formation of Jesuits and partners in mission, scientific, philosophical and theological research, etc. This is what is expected of you and each social secretary in the Society of Jesus.

While there is certainly a need for a strong group of apostolic works dedicated to social work, they make sense when they contribute to the social commitment of the works through which the diverse apostolates of the Society of Jesus are carried out. We cannot be content with attending only to the social "sector". Changing the habit of working in sectors is notoriously tricky. However, to be faithful to the Society's life-mission, it is important to go beyond what has been achieved so far and conceive of the apostolic mission as an evangelizing

continuum. A continuum in which some works -- because of their specialty and their resources -- participate in different ways in a single and unique process towards Reconciliation and Justice as a contribution to the historical incarnation of the Kingdom of justice, peace, and love. This our Hope.

The challenge is great. To conceive of ourselves as an integral apostolic body centered on the mission of reconciliation and justice and guided by the four universal apostolic preferences means acquiring that universal vision characteristic of the charism received by Ignatius of Loyola and the first companions. Superiors at all levels, directors of apostolic works, secretaries of apostolic areas are called to this change of mentality. The role of the secretaries of social justice and ecology is fundamental in this task.

**Second - On the importance of advocacy and the political dimension of our "operative charity".**

The four current GIAN initiatives are an apostolic instrument that belongs to the whole Society of Jesus. In their aims, all Jesuit works should work together on 'universal causes' such as the right to education for all, integral ecology, justice in mining, and forced migration.

In its four current initiatives, the Global Ignatian Advocacy Network (GIAN) has made efforts to remain in the field of lobbying and advocacy. It is true that within the field of advocacy there are different ways of acting: research and documentation, analysis of reality and communications or publications, mobilization and empowerment of communities, promotion of relations between decision-makers and the people involved in the processes, proposing alternatives and public policies, participation in multilateral forums, or direct influence among governments, politicians, businessmen, etc. Advocacy is a vast field of action. However, the vastness of possible local, regional, national, or international actions cannot distract us from its urgency.

Advocacy has not been, is not, and will not be easy. To achieve results in this field, it is necessary to work more closely together (and I am referring again to the participation of all Jesuit works), collaborating with many other organizations and projects, ecclesial or not, that seek to create the social and political conditions of greater dignity for all, of justice and reconciliation between men and women and peoples.

This mission is in your hands as social justice secretaries and as GIAN leaders. Your tasks are complementary. The secretaries are part of the governing service of their Provinces, Regions, or Conferences of Major Superiors: their mission is to

assist their leaders in animating and guiding the apostolic service. The leaders of the GIAN, for their part, have the task of animating and coordinating the common projects that can be carried out between various apostolic institutions in a province, between provinces, regions, or between conferences of major superiors. These are not two independent or exclusive bodies, but two services in which the mission is central, and the functions are complementary.

The process has begun for the GIAN to obtain legal recognition before the Italian State so that its initiatives can become valid interlocutors before those international organizations in which the society's participation would be not only desirable but a responsibility, "*given that there is the capacity and opportunity to do so,*" to quote Fr Arrupe.

An important occasion this year is the preparation, celebration, and follow-up of the agreements resulting from COP30; life on the planet depends to a large extent on what is achieved at the Conference of the Parties in November this year in Brazil. The team of the Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat, together with the GIAN for Integral Ecology, has been working intensively on the following:

- (a) involve the body of the Company,
- (b) articulate our participation,
- (c) prepare for the time before it is held, and
- (d) participate, in November, in the COP 30 in Belém de Pará.

Congratulations on this organizational and participatory effort. But COP30 is only one station on this long journey towards reconciliation and justice for all. And on that journey, there are significant challenges, two of which I would like to highlight:

- a. Our responses—in any of the GIANS and apostolic works—must always include the poor and marginalized. Their voices must be heard but integrated as protagonists, and they must be attended to as an evangelical priority: good news to proclaim.

Communication between 'the victims' and their direct articulations can also be an element of growth and help for the GIANS, just as the presence and enthusiasm of the laity in the articulations of apostolic works are elements of growth and help. Where they are involved and interact with each other, networking flourishes and advances.

If we remain networking only at the level of our institutions' management or directorates, we get lost in the labyrinth of functions and representations. However, synergies and joint participation in projects are enhanced if we promote direct relations, dialogue, and shared responsibilities with those we accompany. The poor, migrants, victims of

violence, people in need of education... they save us when we listen to them, integrate them, and accompany them.

- b. In our apostolic response, we must go beyond houses, buildings, research, and teaching projects and join our efforts with many others to help create the social and political conditions in which what we preach and teach is politically possible.

This is what GC34 invites us to do when, in the Complementary Norms, it affirms that "*...in the fulfilment of the Society's mission today, the social apostolate should occupy a preferential place, tending to ensure that the structures of human coexistence are permeated and become a fuller expression of justice and charity*" (n. 299 §1; n. 298). (n. 299 §1; n. 298).

There is a proper political dimension ("the highest form of charity", according to recent popes) to the social apostolate that we cannot renounce. It requires an apostolic type of "institucionalidad" to help it take shape, an "institucionalidad" with inspiring antecedents, such as the Centers for Research and Social Action (CIAS), established by the Society of Jesus since the mid-twentieth century. It is a presence that we cannot renounce.

**Third. Regarding the need to consolidate social commitment in all the apostolates, while strengthening the social apostolate's works and centers.**

The mission of reconciliation and justice is one and the same. It is not a question of working for reconciliation, peace, and human relations on the one hand and working for social justice on the other. The mission is one and the same for all the works of the Society. Consolidating this awareness and this apostolic concern without weakening the social works themselves is one of the great challenges we face.

More than 25 years ago, Fr Kolvenbach drew attention to this challenge. He warned of the crisis of the social sector, even the risk of its disappearance or, invisibility and irrelevance. He warned about the negative impact such a situation has on the life-mission of the Society of Jesus. This warning is still valid today. Without a solid social apostolate, the mission of reconciliation and justice can remain just fine words.

In that memorable letter of 24 January 2000, after acknowledging some positive signs, Fr Kolvenbach said: "*... this awareness of the social dimension of our mission does not always find concrete expression in a vibrant social apostolate. On the contrary, it shows some worrying weaknesses: there seem to be fewer and fewer Jesuits engaged in the social apostolate, and those that exist are often discouraged and scattered, perhaps*

*lacking in collaboration and organization. (...) Visions of society which used to inspire and strategize for broad structural change have given way to skepticism or, at best, to a mere preference for more modest projects and narrow approaches. The social apostolate is thus in danger of losing its vigour and momentum, its orientation and impact”.*

He went on to say: *“If this were to happen to a given province or assistant, then due to the lack of a vigorous and well-organized social apostolate, the essential social dimension would also gradually fade away. Such a process of erosion would inevitably reduce Our Mission Today (GC32) and Our Mission and Justice (GC34) to a few obligatory but rhetorical phrases in our language, leaving our option for the poor and our promotion of justice hollow”.*

The SJES has integrated into its programming from 2025 to 2027 a survey of the universal Society on the state of the Social Apostolate, which aims to have better baseline information to establish the situation, the difficulties, the capacities, and the challenges we have for this mission. I encourage you to work diligently on it and to offer the best of your abilities, together with the whole apostolic body of the Society, for the success of this diagnosis. It may lead to important decisions for the present and future of the social apostolate as an essential element of the apostolic commitment of the Society of Jesus.

Reducing "the social" to a "*dimension*" unsupported by a solid apostolate with human, technical, and financial resources is unhealthy. To realize the mission of reconciliation and justice, following the inspiration of the Universal Apostolic Preferences, creative ways are needed to strengthen the social commitment of the provinces and regions of the whole Society, by multiplying the works and projects of the social apostolate. In this endeavor, I count on your collaboration and that of the social secretaries of all the apostolic units.

With regard to this challenge, I would like to underline three elements that I consider essential (among others possible):

- a) The social apostolate needs to be involved and present in the formation programs of Jesuits and lay partners. Please do not wait for Jesuits and companions in formation to come to you; make attractive and challenging proposals; entrust concrete responsibilities to Jesuits in the various stages of formation, and involve their apostolic creativity in the programs of your centers and social works.

One learns to love the poor and to serve them evangelically in practice and cordial proximity to the real poor. As Fr. Kolvenbach said in the same letter: *“The perseverance and development of the social apostolate cannot take place without the availability of qualified Jesuits and collaborators. Therefore, I would like to encourage Jesuits involved in the social apostolate and those*

*responsible for formation to cooperate in organizing well-thought-out programs within the Province and interprovincially”.*

b) Always do it from the perspective of an incarnate faith that integrates reconciliation and justice as the same demand: internal/spiritual, interpersonal, communal, ecclesial, social, with creation and with God. Justice is the highest expression of charity: generous love, concerned and active in favor of the poor, even to self-oblation, because *“justice cannot be done without love”* (Rooted and Grounded in Charity, Fr. Arrupe, n. 56).

c) Articulation between different apostolic presences is necessary for developing the mission cycle and collaborating with people, time, and resources.

In the virtuous cycle of mission (according to the famous diagram that Patxi Alvarez helped us systematize accompany, serve, reflect, raise awareness, advocate/advocacy), the task of transforming structures so that they *“are a fuller expression of justice and charity”* is presented as the culmination of a series of joint efforts that require an enormous capacity for collaboration.

The works of the social apostolate are called to provide the special service of coordinating between different apostolic presences, weaving or holding together this circle of mission.

We must strategically invest time, people, and resources in this. While every step or form of service is important, reflection, awareness-raising, and advocacy are key elements of the social apostolate that must not be overlooked.

Thank you.

Fr. General Arturo Sosa, SJ.  
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