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Change starts with you | #4 April 2025

Your Compassion in Action

Emergencies

Updates on the war in Ukraine and Africa's ongoing crises.

Project Compassion

Read the stories of Irene, Toefuata'iga and Lam.

Program snapshot

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Editor: Connie Zehender
Design: Ellie Wong
Cover: Toefuata’iga writes on a chalkboard in a primary school classroom in Samoa. Photo: Caritas Australia.
Photo: Caritas Australia.
All photos belong to Caritas Australia unless otherwise stated.



Principal Ada teaching English lessons to Toefuata’iga and other students in their primary school in Samoa.

Words of Gratitude

For over 60 years, Project Compassion has been at the very heart of our mission and at the centre of everything we do at Caritas Australia. It has enabled us to work hand-in-hand with communities worldwide, providing the tools, resources and opportunities they need to create lasting change.

I have been deeply moved by seeing schools, parishes and people across Australia come together to give alms and raise funds to directly support life-changing programs in areas such as education, health, livelihoods and Disaster Risk Reduction.

With so many crises happening around the world – be it war, famine, conflict or the ongoing threats posed by climate change – Project Compassion feels like a beacon of faith and hope in our humanity, and I am humbled by the kindness of our supporters. It is truly remarkable to witness the generosity of people like you, who embody the spirit of giving during Lent. Your contributions empower individuals and families to build brighter, more sustainable futures, breaking the cycle of poverty and putting an end to injustice and inequality.

This year, Project Compassion invites us to reflect on the power of our impact in marginalised communities, and to Unite Against Poverty this Lent. Whether it’s through fundraising, making a donation, or by sharing the stories featured in this edition, every action you take makes a difference.

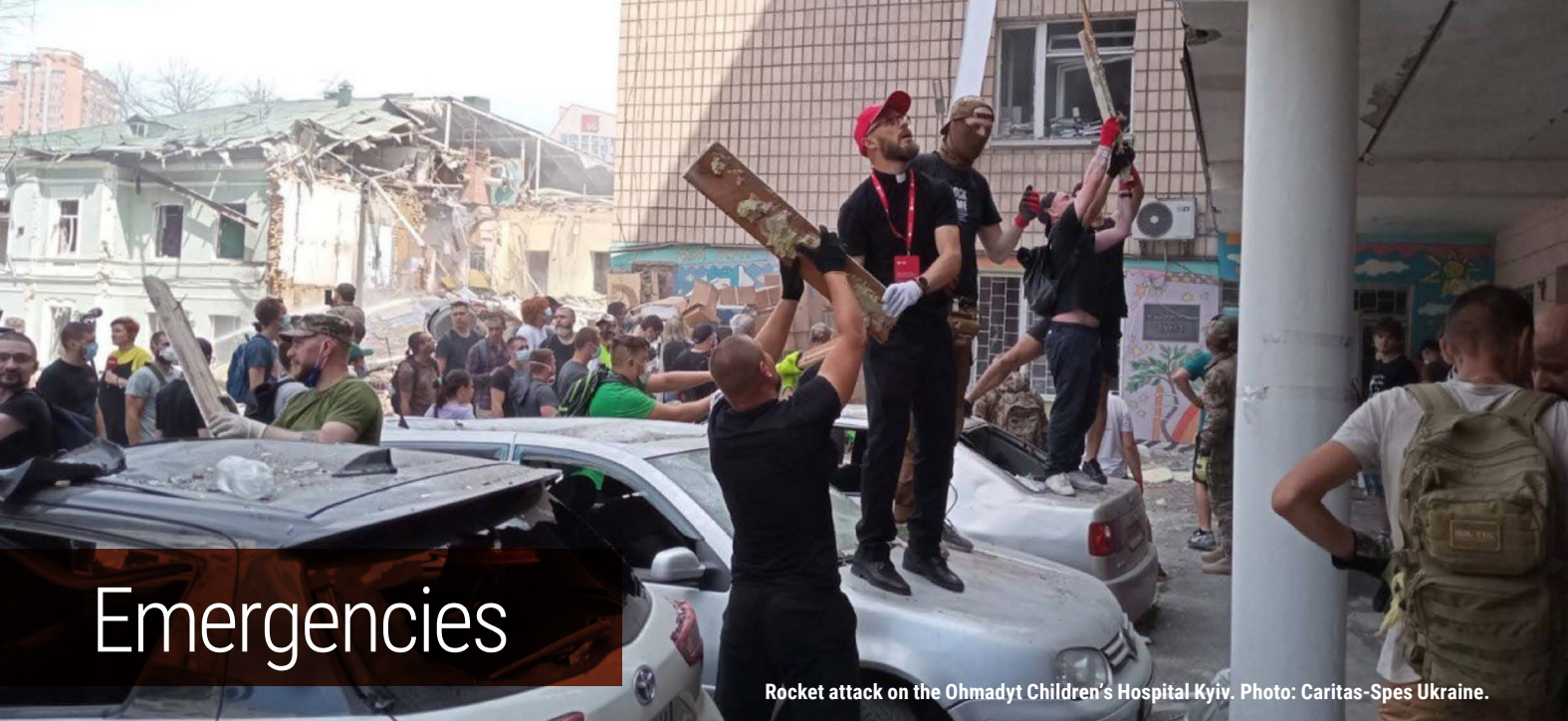
This edition of *Your Compassion in Action* brings you the stories of Project Compassion 2025 – Irene from Democratic of the Congo, Toefuata’iga from Samoa and Lam from Vietnam. We also share with you updates from the war in Ukraine, news from Africa – where conflict, hunger and displacement continue to affect the region, and bring you stories from our community.

I am deeply grateful for your support and the transformative impact we achieve together. Thank you for standing with us in our mission at Caritas Australia. With your kindness, we will continue to walk alongside those in need, building a more just and compassionate world for all. Thank you for your unwavering commitment to Project Compassion.

On behalf of everyone at Caritas Australia, I hope that you enjoy reading about *Your Compassion in Action*.



With gratitude,
Kirsten Sayers
**Interim Chief Executive Officer
Caritas Australia**



Rocket attack on the Ohmadyt Children's Hospital Kyiv. Photo: Caritas-Spes Ukraine.

Emergencies

War in Ukraine: Three years on

As the war in Ukraine enters its fourth year, the humanitarian crisis continues to deepen. With nearly one-third of Ukraine's population – **12.7 million people** – requiring aid, our partners Caritas Ukraine and CAFOD remain on the frontlines, delivering vital assistance while helping communities rebuild.

Since Russia's invasion in 2022, your kindness and generosity have helped support over 4 million people with emergency relief, including shelter, food, water, medical care and psychosocial support. In addition to immediate aid, our partners remain focused on long-term recovery, helping Ukrainians regain employment, secure housing and access education.

"Our goal is to help war-affected people emerge from crisis and become independent from humanitarian aid as much as possible," says Tetiana Stawnychy, President of Caritas Ukraine.

However, as the need for humanitarian assistance grows, international funding is declining. Vulnerable groups, including low-income families, the elderly, and people with disabilities are facing even greater risks.

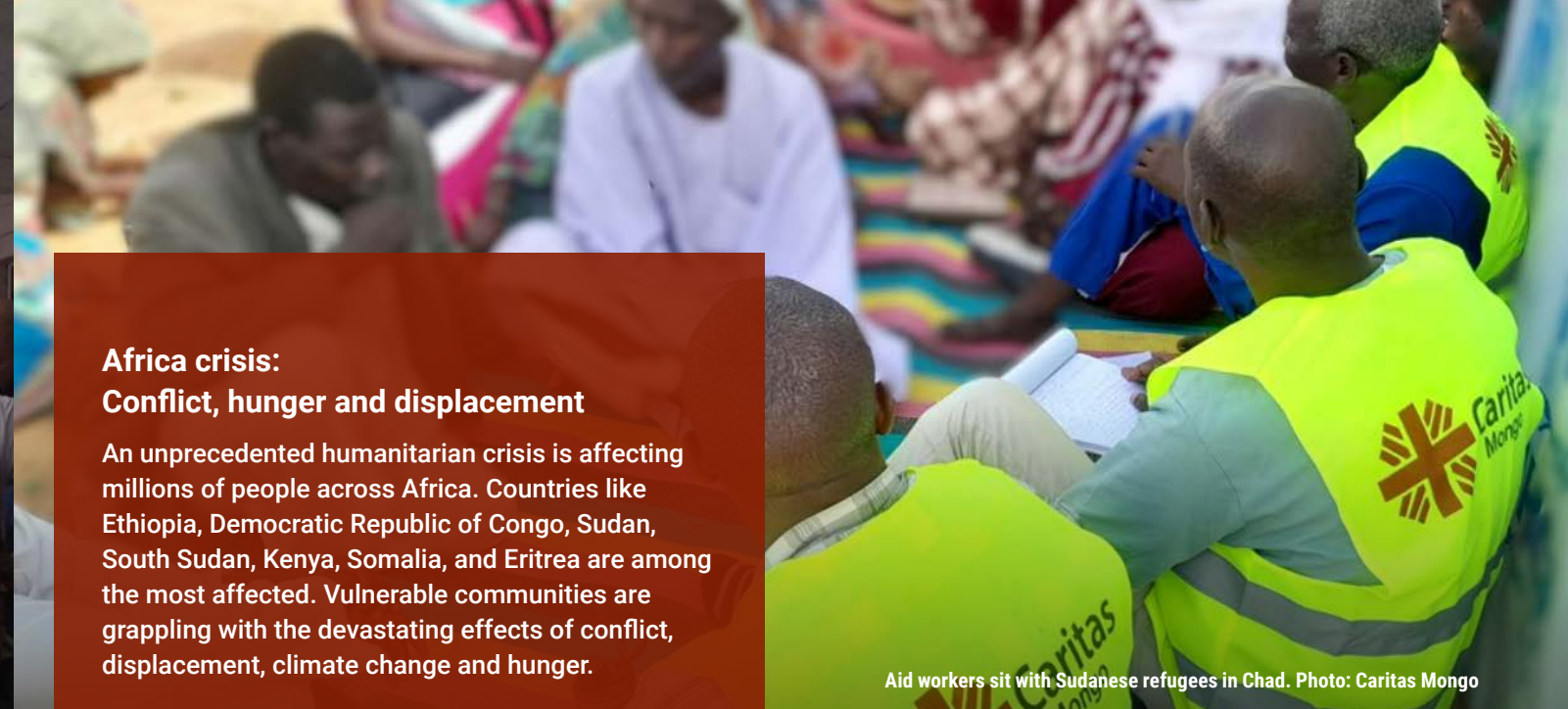
September 2024 recorded the highest civilian casualties since mid-2022, with 574 civilians killed in three months. Recent statistics continue to paint a stark picture:

- **Over 40,000** civilian casualties, including 12,400 deaths
- **6.8 million** refugees displaced overseas and **3.6 million** internally displaced people
- **Over 9 million** people now living in poverty.

Attacks on homes, schools, hospitals, and vital infrastructure like electricity supply, bridges and roads persist, making humanitarian aid more critical than ever. Caritas calls for sustained international support to ensure local humanitarian agencies can continue their essential work. By standing with Ukraine today, you can help war-affected communities rebuild and create a path toward recovery and peace.



www.caritas.org.au/donate/emergency-appeals/ukraine/



Aid workers sit with Sudanese refugees in Chad. Photo: Caritas Mongo

Africa crisis: Conflict, hunger and displacement

An unprecedented humanitarian crisis is affecting millions of people across Africa. Countries like Ethiopia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, South Sudan, Kenya, Somalia, and Eritrea are among the most affected. Vulnerable communities are grappling with the devastating effects of conflict, displacement, climate change and hunger.

Conflict and Displacement

Conflict and violence have left 16.9 million people living in internal displacement in Eastern Africa as of the end of 2023, in countries like Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia and South Sudan. Sudan alone was hosting 9.1 million Internally displaced people (IDPs) making it the world's largest and one of the most neglected displacement crises (Internal Displacement in Africa: An overview of trends and developments 2009-2023, IDMC).

Food Insecurity

The convergence of conflict, drought and economic instability has led to widespread food insecurity and even famine in parts of Sudan.

Climate Change

Severe droughts and unpredictable weather patterns have decimated crops and livestock, stripping communities of their primary food sources and livelihoods. This environmental degradation exacerbates the existing humanitarian challenges. Currently:

- **51.7 million** people are facing food insecurity across the region.

- **9.3 million** children are acutely malnourished.
- **20 million** people are internally displaced.

Thanks to the generosity of supporters like you, we are helping our local partners in addressing the most urgent needs by:

- **Providing Emergency Aid:** Delivering essential food supplies, clean water, and hygiene facilities to affected communities.
- **Supporting Displaced Families:** Offering emergency shelter and psychological support to those forced from their homes due to conflict.
- **Implementing Cash Assistance Programs:** Facilitating emergency cash transfers to help families meet their immediate needs and regain stability.

Your support is crucial in helping alleviate this crisis. By donating to Caritas Australia's Africa Conflict, Displacement, and Hunger Crisis Appeal, you can help provide lifesaving assistance to those in dire circumstances.



www.caritas.org.au/donate/emergency-appeals/africa-conflict-displacement-and-hunger-crisis/

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"Our lives are so different now. Before, women depended on men's income, but now, with our sewing skills, we can take care of ourselves."

- Irene



Irene at her home in Kongolo, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Photo: Arlette Bashizi/Caritas Australia.

Your generosity is helping women like Irene gain skills training

Irene is a 25-year-old single mother of two boys living in Democratic Republic of Congo. Despite experiencing extreme poverty, she has become a skilled seamstress. Thanks to the generosity of people like you, Irene can now support her children's education with her income.

After her father died in war, Irene along with her mother and siblings were displaced, and her mother became the sole breadwinner for the family. Despite the difficulties her mother faced trying to afford school fees, Irene persevered to attend school for as long as she could.

However, when Irene was a teenager, she became pregnant and the father of her child abandoned her not long after she gave birth. Irene's lack of education limited her job opportunities, and further complicated her ability to support her family's basic needs.

Without the skills to find paid employment, Irene's chance of ever escaping the cycle of poverty on her own was slim.

However, thanks to the kindness of people like you, our partner Caritas Kongolo helped Irene join the Youth Capacity Strengthening Program. This gave her access to the resources that would grant her a second chance at a brighter future for her and her family.

Irene took up a sewing course, which also provided sewing machines and fabrics. In addition to this, Caritas Kongolo ran agricultural training sessions so that she could grow and produce food for her family. At the end of her course, Irene and her peers were provided with sewing machines so that they could continue practicing their skills and earn an income.

Irene's newfound skills also enabled her to take on a mentoring role, training other young women to sew.

"With the earnings from this job, I can not only buy my own clothes but also for my family members... Regarding the children I send to school, there are my orphaned nephews from my late brother. I make sure to provide for all their needs," she added.

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AGAINST
POVERTY**
this Lent



CARITAS AUSTRALIA PROJECT COMPASSION

*"I would like to become
a good teacher. To teach
the children so they will
have a brighter future."*

- Toefuata'iga

Toefuata'iga holding her book during class.

Your kindness is helping students like Toefuata'iga access safe and clean water

For 13-year-old Toefuata'iga and her classmates in the Upolu region of Samoa, a day at school used to be defined by uncertainty. Not because of exams or lessons, but because of something far more basic than this – access to clean and safe water.

Her school community lacked a reliable water supply, which meant frequent school closures, health risks and disrupted learning.

Despite being surrounded by vast ocean waters, many communities in Samoa struggle with access to safe drinking water. The ongoing impacts of climate change have led to prolonged dry spells in the island, while heavy rains contaminate existing supplies. To make matters worse, the Samoan Water Authority pipeline is often shut down due to natural disasters or maintenance.

"School would finish early, so we wouldn't finish our lessons because when there wasn't any water, we wouldn't have classes," said Toefuata'iga.

Teachers often had to leave the school to fetch water from nearby homes, paying out of their own pockets to compensate neighbors for using their water. This added further strain to the staff and local community. Additionally, the absence of a reliable water source led to compromised hygiene, increasing the risk of dehydration and waterborne diseases.

However, thanks to your generosity, our partner Caritas Samoa installed a 10,000-litre water tank, which enabled the school to maintain regular class schedules, improving both educational outcomes and student health. Attendance and enrolment numbers surged, as parents no longer worried about sending their children to a school without access to clean water.

"When we opened our water tank, the parents were really happy, they were over the moon..." shared Principal Ada. ***"Now we don't need to send the children home early, and we can keep up with our lessons. It's made such a difference."***

The tank has also alleviated some of the financial burdens faced by teachers and nearby families, allowing the school community to focus on education.

With access to clean and safe water, Toefuata'iga can now pursue her dreams, and her school is in a much better position to provide a stable learning environment.

CARITAS AUSTRALIA PROJECT COMPASSION

"I'm really hoping this initiative keeps growing and spreading its impact, uplifting even more people in similar situations, both here at home and around the globe."

- Lam

Lam is working as a freelance Graphic Designer from his home in Quang Nam, Vietnam.

The impact of your support in Lam's journey from isolation to independence

Your generous support of Project Compassion has been a life-changing gift to young people living with disabilities, enabling them to overcome barriers and unlock their full potential. Lam's story is an example of how your kindness and compassion have made a real difference.

Growing up as a person of short stature in rural Vietnam, Lam experienced significant physical and social barriers due to his disability. When Lam graduated high school, many of his fellow students pursued their career aspirations at university, studying to become doctors, teachers and other vocations. But it wasn't the same for Lam, whose physical disability meant there were few vocations available to him.

Without access to any employment opportunities, his future career prospects seemed limited, and he spent most of his time at home completing household chores with his family, harvesting vegetables, feeding chickens and cooking meals. Lam felt increasingly isolated and disconnected from his friends and society.

"I'm really self-conscious about my height. It feels like getting around and doing a lot of basic tasks are a major undertaking for me," Lam said. "It's a struggle to feel like we fit into society, and our limited mobility makes it hard to access jobs or education."

Caritas Australia's partner in Vietnam, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), opened the doors for Lam to pursue his dream of becoming a graphic designer.

The I-SHINE program is designed to help children and youth with disabilities in Vietnam access education, vocational training and start-up opportunities to generate an income.

With your support, Lam was able to take part in the I-SHINE program where he was financially supported to complete a six-month IT Technician training course in Da Nang.

"It's been a game-changer, giving me the chance to connect with friends, gain more professional knowledge, and land a job that aligns with my passions and interests," Lam said.

Today, Lam is a successful graphic designer, freelancing for both local and international clients. He is able to make a stable income from his job and he is an inspiration to other young people in his community facing similar challenges.

Along with your generosity, this program is supported by the Australian government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).



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Mark a special sacrament with a gift that brings hope and change to those in need. Caritas Australia's Global Gifts support life-changing programs that provide clean water, education, and sustainable livelihoods for vulnerable communities. Whether celebrating a **Baptism, First Holy Communion, or Confirmation**, your gift can be a meaningful expression of faith and generosity.

Give a gift that reflects the true spirit of giving and makes a lasting impact.

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www.caritas.org.au/global-gifts



Program snapshot:

Bishop Daniel Meagher visits our partner Grassroots Action Palmerston

Last December, Bishop Danny Meagher from the Archdiocese of Sydney visited our First Australian partner Grassroots Action Palmerston (GAP) to witness the profound impact that their work has on its participants and in the wider community in the Northern Territory. During his visit, Bishop Meagher met apprentice carpenters Cedric and Manu, whose lives have been transformed by the generosity of people like you, and by GAP's work.

"GAP has changed my life," Manu told bishop Meagher. **"I'm out there doing something productive, earning money and supporting myself and my family. GAP has significantly improved my life. I wouldn't be where I am today without their help,"** Cedric added.

Prior to joining GAP, Cedric and Manu were young men navigating the complexities of life in Darwin, shaped by the strength of their culture and the challenges of their environment. Skilled with their hands and deeply connected to their community, they sought opportunities to build a future beyond the barriers they faced.

GAP offers new opportunities to disengaged young Aboriginal people. By working collaboratively with local community members, businesses and government, they create positive outcomes in key areas that young people have identified as important.

Aunties Place, their HQ, is a residential property complete with a kitchen, living room and sensory areas, where young people can learn how to cook, self-soothe and get support finding work and housing.

"It was very inspiring to see Cedric and Manu at Auntie's Place. It felt warm and friendly, like a true motherly home for the young men," Bishop Meagher shared.



Bishop Danny, Dan Skehan (Caritas Australia's Director of Programs) and boys from GAP building a fire. Photo: Sydney Catholic.

Bishop Meagher was accompanied by Dan Skehan, the Programs Director at Caritas Australia.

"It's a great opportunity for Bishop Danny to visit our first Australians project, GAP. They work with young, disadvantaged Aboriginal children to help them connect with their cultural identity and secure pathways to full-time employment. It's truly inspirational," said Dan.

"I wouldn't be where I am without Caritas Australia. They believed in me and introduced me to key supporters and funders. Without that support, I couldn't be doing what I'm doing now," added GAP founder, Serena Dalton.

Events and Fundraisers

Project Compassion 2025 launches across Australia

Schools and parishes all across Australia celebrated the launch of Project Compassion on Tuesday 4 March. Schools, parishes and supporters across Australia came together to raise funds for people living in some of the most vulnerable communities worldwide. See how different communities across Australia have celebrated Project Compassion so far.

Melbourne, Victoria

Caritas Australia kicked off Project Compassion in Melbourne with a vibrant event at Emmaus College, where 240 students from 22 different schools came together. Students engaged in activities to plan their initiatives for the campaign.

Townsville, Queensland

The Townsville Diocese celebrated the launch of Project Compassion at St Francis School in Ayr. The event featured an inspiring homily from Bishop Tim Harris and heartfelt performances by students. Representatives from clergy, diocesan staff, parishes and schools gathered to support this vital initiative for vulnerable communities worldwide.

Tasmania

Caritas Australia launched Project Compassion 2025 across Hobart, Launceston, and Burnie, marking Burnie's first launch. The team travelled over 800 km in 60 hours, engaging with parishioners and visiting five primary schools. They also kicked off the Long Walk for Water campaign during the trip.



Archbishop Peter Comensoli with students at Emmaus College at Project Compassion launch in Melbourne.



Project Compassion launch at St Francis School in Ayr, the Diocese of Townsville.



Pancakes at the Breakfast Club at St Finn Barrs Primary School, Invermay (Launceston).

In the spotlight

Launch of Caritas Timor-Leste

On 1 March 2025, Caritas Timor-Leste was officially launched, marking a significant step forward in providing vital long-term development support to the people of Timor-Leste.

For years, the country has been served by three Diocese Caritas organisations, but now with the creation of a unified national entity, Caritas Timor-Leste is poised to make an even greater impact.

This momentous occasion was celebrated with representatives from the Caritas network, the Church, and local supporters – all of whom play a vital role in helping bring this vision to life. Father Mario de Carvalho, the Director of Caritas Timor-Leste, launched the organisation's Strategic Plan, highlighting its goals and future aspirations. The event also featured a cake-cutting ceremony, symbolising the beginning of this exciting new chapter for the organisation.

Caritas Australia has been a dedicated partner in supporting the development of Caritas Timor-Leste. The generosity and commitment of supporters like you have been instrumental in helping to bring the organisation to



Cake-cutting ceremony at the launch of Caritas Timor-Leste. Photo: Caritas Timor-Leste.

this point, and we are excited to continue our support as Caritas Timor-Leste expands its services.

This launch represents not only a new chapter for Caritas Timor-Leste but also a renewed opportunity for us all to make a lasting difference. Thanks to the ongoing support of donors, Caritas Timor-Leste will continue to be a beacon of hope for the people of Timor-Leste, helping to meet their needs and build a better tomorrow.

We would love to hear your stories of compassion!

If you have a story you would like to see featured in *Your Compassion in Action* – or would like to nominate someone from your school or Parish community, please reach out to the Publications Editor at connie.zehender@caritas.org.au.

You can ensure **your generosity lasts for generations** to come.



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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island readers should be aware that this publication may contain images or names of people who have since passed away. Caritas Australia acknowledges the traditional owners and custodians, past and present, of the land on which all our offices are located.

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THANK YOU

For being a partner in compassion and helping vulnerable people around the world build a brighter future.

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