



**SOCIETY OF SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL
INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION
Council General International
IEC & PS Annual Meeting
11 & 12 September 2021**

**Welcome speech
Renato Lima de Oliveira
16th President General**

My dear brothers and sisters,

Praised be our Lord Jesus Christ! Praise him for ever!

Good afternoon to everyone, following us around the world, via Ozanam TV.

Good afternoon, all members of the Permanent Section, and good afternoon to all 20 National Presidents forming the International Executive Committee, who are taking part today and tomorrow in this International Council General event.

A warm welcome to everyone. We are here in Madrid, the beautiful capital of Spain.

The annual Plenary meeting of the International Council General, for 2021, is once more being held in virtual form, because of the restrictions imposed by the international health crisis, over the two days, Saturday 11 September and Sunday 12 September.

Our plenary session has plenty of interesting topics. We have the ceremony for the award of the “Charity in Hope” medal to the Pontifical Council, “Aid to the Church in Need”; we are also signing a cooperation agreement with the Secular Vincentian Missionaries (MISEVI); and we have two special talks, one on the progress in international solidarity by the Council General, the other on the “SSVP Plus” project.

I humbly request everyone to approve the various resolutions we will propose during these two days, because they will allow us to increase our agility with the various initiatives and projects underway from Council General.

Let us ask our Lord Jesus Christ to allow us to meet face-to-face at the Plenary Session next week, which we hope to be able to hold, God willing, in Nairobi, Kenya.

I would like to start by thanking the President of the National Council of Spain, **Juan Manuel Buergo Gómez**, for his warm reception and the excellent organisation of this event.

I am sure that the good God is keeping for you, dear Brother Juan Manuel, some new and important tasks in future, because we know of your abilities, your love of the poor, your impeccable administrative organisation and your humble service.

I want you to know, dear friend, that you are helping me a great deal on Council General with your ideas, your honesty and your commitment to the projects which are giving a new face to the Council General, to be closer to the Conferences and to all our fellow members. May God reward you for everything!

My thanks just expressed to President Juan Manuel I also extend to all those Vincentian leaders and colleagues of the National Council of Spain, who have worked with Council General for several months to prepare this 2021 Plenary so efficiently and well.

I also thank the **staff in Paris**, led by the **Secretary General**, Marie-Françoise Salesiani-Payet, who have prepared all documents, resolutions and reports which will be approved at this meeting. Many thanks for your devotion and efforts.

To my dear fellow member **Joseph Pandian**, Vice-president General, I publicly express my gratitude for his constant advice to me, helping me a great deal in management of the Board. I have learned so much from you, dear Vice-president!

And our fellow member **Larry Tuomey**, our dear General Treasurer (in this "Year of Jules Devaux", first Treasurer of our Society), my thanks too for your help in the financial management of the Council General, strictly in accordance with international practices and due diligence.

Finally, for all members of the **International Board** in whatever area, especially the **National Councils** forming part of the Confederation, I say "MANY THANKS" for the unconditional support you provide for the Council General.

Thanks to this **unity** and the **strategic alignment**, we are achieving and even exceeding all our planned objectives. Here I emphasise and insist: this is not down to me, but to all those who have joined in this process.

Beloved fellow members,

This International Plenary meeting coincides with a very significant time for us: **the five-year point of our term of office** with the International Council General. I remember when I was elected in 2016, by you all, to lead the fortunes of this Council.

Serving on Council General is a **gift of God**, as well as a huge **responsibility** and great **privilege**.

The Council General is the great **protector of the Rule** and **guardian of unity**, maintaining the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul on the basis of the same foundations and principles across over 150 territories where it is present. That is how we have acted during this term of office, even during the serious impact caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Our concerns focus around providing **transparent, open, democratic and consensual management**, always staying close to the members, showing the importance, value and relevance of the Council General for the entire SSVP.

I am a person of **dialogue, working** and **praying hard** (I have to get better at prayer), and that's how we have led the Council General. We don't always get it right, but we can guarantee one thing: we will never sit back with arms folded, especially in these difficult Covid-19 times.

As the first Brazilian (and first Latin American) to fill this important role, I am very happy with the objectives already reached, and ask for everyone's prayers.

I will go on to mention briefly some of the **most outstanding successes** of our term of office so far:

- Distributing biographies of the seven founders, and boosting the canonisation process for Blessed Antoine-Frédéric Ozanam, with the investigation of a possible second miracle by the Vatican.
- Creation of the International Solidarity Fund (ISF) to expand our fraternal aid beyond the borders already covered by Council General, through the International Commission for Aid and Development (CIAD) and the Twinnage department.
- Launch of new books and modules for the Universal Training Programme, and annual publication of the President General's Circular letters.
- Creation of the International Day for SSVP Youth (4 July), and the International Day for women members (14 August).
- Numerous advances for youth, with the Salamanca meeting (2018), the youth census, the university booklet and youth exchanges.
- Modernisation of communications, with a new web page, institutional video, Ozanam TV, annual reports, social networks and information newsletters, expanding transparency in Council General.
- Creation of the General Mediator (Ombudsman), to receive comments, congratulations and criticisms, and also to resolve possible conflicts.
- Emphasis on institutional relations with NGOs, the Vincentian Family, the United Nations and bodies of the Church, through cooperation agreements, as well as the President General's appointment to some major pontifical dicasteries.
- Official missionary visits by the President General to over 40 countries, as well as the strategic missions by Territorial Vice-presidents to National Councils.

- Unconditional support for the work of the 12 International Vice-presidents (with creation of a Vice-presidency for Oceania).
- Expansion of the SSVP into six territories, with the “SSVP Plus” project (Liberia, Vatican City, Cyprus, Cayman Islands, Albania and Tanzania).
- Purchase of a new head office in Paris, (where the “Espace Historique Ozanam” is also located), to strengthen the Council General’s assets.
- Appointment of the first female Secretary General in the 182-year history of Council General, Marie-Françoise Salesiani-Payet.
- Expanded, democratic Board, with 16 members, to make governance by Council General more effective.
- During the pandemic, 300,000 euros sent to 60 countries for humanitarian aid, expansion of on-line training and numerous meetings held on line.

I want to share these successes with all those who have helped and continue to help the Council General in its organisational mission. Our proposal - almost our obsession - is to make the Council General **better known, valued, loved and closer** to everyone. And I hope we are achieving this objective.

Beloved fellow members,

I want to **welcome new National Presidents**, since many have been elected and taken up their role since our last Plenary meeting in Paris in 2020. And at the same time, I praise God for the Presidents who have completed their terms, in their respective National Councils, to whom I send my **deepest thanks**.

I cannot thank enough the **interpreters** who support us during these two days, since I am well aware that the success of this event depends on their effective work.

Finally, I would like to announce three new appointments, which will considerably improve the administrative management of Council General. Based on articles 3.19 and 3.20 of the Statutes of our Confederation, I am pleased to appoint, from today, three new deputies:

- **Deputy Secretary General:** Jean-Marc Ossogo (France).
- **Deputy General Treasurer:** José Manuel Gredilla Bastos (Spain).
- **Assistant Spiritual Adviser:** Father Frederico Hozanan de Pádua, CssR (Brazil).

Many thanks for accepting our invitation. “Anyone who wants to be first, must be the very last of all and servant of all” (Mark 9, 35). Welcome to Council General!

Affectionate greetings to everyone! Let's have a great meeting!

Peace to you all, with Vincent, Ozanam and Devaux.

Madrid, Spain, 11 and 12 September 2021.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Renato Lima de Oliveira', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Renato Lima de Oliveira
16th President-General