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Media Release

Project Compassion: Transforming tourism, Bolivia

Just two weeks into Project Compassion, Australians are digging deep to support nation's largest annual aid and development fundraiser. With four weeks remaining in the Lenten appeal, Caritas Australia hopes this year's Project Compassion will be the best yet.

In 2010, Project Compassion raised \$9.4 million, bolstering Caritas Australia's work as part of the world's second largest development network - present in over 200 countries and territories. Year after year, Australians stand in solidarity with some of the world's most remote and vulnerable communities and recommit to uproot entrenched poverty the world over.

Caritas Australia's CEO, Jack de Groot, said: "Last year we set ourselves a target of \$10 million; we didn't quite get there, but 2010 was the most successful Project Compassion in the agency's history. As we stand by our multi-year commitments to existing partners and seek out new opportunities to achieve global justice, we are determined to set a new appeal record with each passing year.

"At Lent we reaffirm our commitment to justice. In schools, in parishes and in homes, Project Compassion puts that commitment in action, creating a rich and passionate community of concern that encourages all Australians to understand and challenge the structures that perpetuate poverty."

Together with local community partners, Caritas Australia creates opportunities for people to be the architects of their own futures. With a commitment to long-term partnership and holistic community development, Caritas Australia lays the foundations for change and provides the scaffolding communities need to overcome enduring poverty.

"In Bolivia's Yuracaré Indigenous Community Lands, there are no roads, there is no electricity, and there are no phones; the challenges are immense and to most, the opportunities appear slim. But for our local partners, and the people of Yuquí, these remote and little-known lands hold the promise of new beginnings," said Mr de Groot.

Rosa is the leadership coordinator of a profitable grass-roots tourism project in Yuquí. With help from our local partners, she facilitates community support for the project, promoting tourism opportunities with other Indigenous peoples, local and national authorities, whilst asserting the communities' culture and preserving their land.

"My people long to improve their lives and provide a viable future for our children. My commitment is to promote participation of Indigenous people, affirm our cultural identity and construct our survival as a people with dignity. I think if we all work together we'll come out ahead - this project will strengthen our communities and organisations.

"I dream that all families are united and engaged in their own development. I dream of ensuring protection of our territories and resources, and of young leaders, full of vitality and commitment to restore the dignity of our people. Maybe this is one of the greatest challenges.

"Thanks to the efforts of each family we are slowly gaining our rights - we are achieving our empowerment as a people."

Donations can be made to Project Compassion by phoning 1800 024 413, on-line at www.caritas.org.au or by posting your cheque to GPO Box 9830, Sydney NSW 2001 (Please include your personal details, including your parish name and diocese). For more information or enquiries please contact: Catherine Stace – Maitland-Newcastle Diocesan Director for Caritas catherine.stace@mn.catholic.org.au