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A man wearing a black suit, clerical collar, pectoral collar and glasses speaks into a microphone

Archbishop Tarcisius Isao Kikuchi of Tokyo, president of Caritas Internationalis, speaks to reporters at a news conference in the Vatican press office May 16, 2023. Looking on are Kirsty Robertson, Caritas vice president, and Alistair Dutton, Caritas secretary-general. (CNS photo/Lola Gomez)

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Meeting the press, the new leaders of Caritas Internationalis vowed to treat staff and members of the Caritas network with the same love and respect that they treat the poor and needy they serve around the globe.

Archbishop Tarcisius Isao Kikuchi of Tokyo was elected May 13 to a four-year term as president. Kirsty Robertson, CEO of Caritas Australia, was elected vice president two days later. And Alistair Dutton, chief executive of the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund, was elected secretary-general May 15.

Caritas Internationalis, the Vatican-based umbrella organization for 162 official Catholic charities operating in 200 countries and territories around the world, had

been overseen by temporary administrators since November when Pope Francis suspended the secretary-general and other top officials after the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development investigated complaints about the workplace environment and bullying.

Speaking to reporters at the Vatican press office May 16, Dutton said, "Caritas is my home, my family and my vocation, and I'm really delighted and honored to serve the family in this way."

Dutton has more than 25 years of experience in the humanitarian field, according to a Caritas press release, and has led projects in more than 70 countries. From 2009 to 2014, he served at the Vatican as the humanitarian director of Caritas Internationalis.

The elections took place during the Caritas general assembly in Rome May 11-16; the assembly brought together more than 400 delegates from the national Caritas organizations around the world.

"There's been a wonderful sense of the family coming together," Dutton said. "There's a great team getting together, thirsty to get out and get on with it."

Dutton would not comment on allegations by the previous secretary-general, Aloysius John, in a letter obtained by the Associated Press that his dismissal was "made in haste, with incredible violence and very poor public communication," and that it was a "brutal power grab."

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Asked about John, Dutton said, "I cannot begin to imagine how it must feel to be removed by a papal decree, and I'm sure Aloysius is still very, very hurt."

But, "we have to look to the future and build for the future," he said. "It's a moment of reconciliation."

Kikuchi said that from his experience as a Caritas volunteer with Rwandan refugees in Africa and later as executive director of Caritas Japan from 1999-2004 and its president from 2007-2022, the people Caritas assists are grateful for the food, clothing and shelter offered, but they always ask not to be forgotten once the war or

disaster has dropped from the headlines.

The archbishop said that Caritas Internationalis, "but also dioceses and the entire Catholic Church," which are always talking about love for others, must ensure they "execute the same thing inside."

"We want to bring hope to people, hope for life," the archbishop said. "As Caritas, we want to walk with people in their difficulties, to be with them and create hope for the future."

While Caritas Internationalis has had a woman as secretary-general, Robertson is the first woman to be elected vice president, a position that entails representing the leadership at Caritas events around the globe and "relating with the church leadership at the highest levels," she said.

"In every country in the world, women have yet to achieve economic equality with men," she said. "The face of poverty is the face of a woman."

But also, with so many women leading national Caritas organizations and volunteering with Catholic charities around the globe, she said, "it is only right and just to see the face of women at all levels in our confederation."

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