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Intervention of the Secretary for Relations with States of the Holy See at the Brussels Conference on Syria (4 to 5 April 2017)

The Conference “Supporting the future of Syria and the region” began in Brussels yesterday, co-chaired by the European Union, Germany, Kuwait, Norway, Qatar, the United Kingdom and the United Nations. It will also be attended by ministerial level representatives of seventy delegations, and representatives of international organizations and civil society.

The following is the intervention of His Excellency Msgr. Paul Richard Gallagher, secretary for Relations with States of the Holy See, given yesterday during the concluding day of the conference.

Intervention of His Excellency Msgr. Paul Richard Gallagher

Your Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

The Holy See is pleased to participate in the “Supporting the future of Syria and the region” Conference with its twofold aim: to reconfirm the humanitarian commitments that the international community made in London last year, and to look at the best ways to support a lasting political solution to the Syrian crisis, that is inclusive and Syrian-led. While the crisis has entered, regrettably and painfully, into its seventh year, the Holy See remains deeply concerned about the tremendous human suffering, affecting millions of innocent children and other civilians who remain deprived of essential humanitarian aid, medical facilities and education, and urges that international humanitarian law be fully respected, particularly with regard to the protection of civilian populations, guaranteeing them access to necessary medical assistance. Furthermore, the Holy See also expresses its concern for the conditions and treatment of prisoners and detainees.

In his address to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, on 9 January last, His Holiness Pope Francis appealed to the international community “to make every effort to encourage serious negotiations for an end to the conflict, which is causing a genuine human catastrophe. Each of the parties must give priority to international humanitarian law, and guarantee the protection of civilians and needed humanitarian aid for the populace”.

The Holy See invites all parties to the Syrian conflict to spare no effort to end the seemingly endless cycle of violence, to restore that sense of solidarity that is the basis of social cohesion and peaceful coexistence. As Pope Francis has stated: "Peace triumphs through solidarity. It generates the desire for dialogue and cooperation which finds an essential instrument in diplomacy".

The Holy See warmly welcomes the emphasis on providing humanitarian assistance and the efforts to sustain the ceasefire and the political solution to the crisis at this pledging conference and joins its voice to the appeals for increased funding to help the internally displaced persons, the refugees and impacted-host communities in the neighbouring countries. On this occasion, I wish to reassure that the Catholic Church remains committed to continue its humanitarian assistance in the coming year.

In 2016, the Holy See and the Catholic Church, through its network of charitable agencies, contributed to providing USD 200 million of humanitarian assistance of direct benefit to more than 4.6 million people in Syria and the region. In distributing aid, Catholic agencies and entities make no distinction regarding the religious or ethnic identity of those requiring assistance, and seek always to give priority to the most vulnerable and to those most in need. This approach was demonstrated also through the opening in January of a Caritas point in the Muslim area of East Aleppo and the "Open hospitals" project that seeks to open the Catholic hospitals in Aleppo and Damascus and render them fully operative for the needs of the local populations, especially the poor and disadvantaged.

Of deep concern remains the vulnerable situation of Christians and religious minorities in the Middle East, who suffer disproportionately the effects of war and social upheaval in the region, to such an extent that their very presence and existence are gravely threatened. As His Holiness Pope Francis has repeatedly recalled, their continued presence can enable them to fulfil their historic and essential role of contributing to the social cohesion of those societies, which will be of vital importance for the future of the entire region.
