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Audience with the members of the National Committee for Biosafety, Biotechnology and Life Sciences

At 11.15 this morning, in the Hall of Popes of the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the National Committee for Biosafety, Biotechnology and Life Sciences, on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the institution of the Committee at the Presidency of the Council of Ministers.

The following is Pope Francis' address to those present:

Holy Father's Address

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I cordially welcome each of you and I thank the president, Professor Andrea Lenzi, for the kind words with which he introduced our meeting. I would like first to express appreciation for the work carried out by the National Committee for Biosafety, Biotechnology and Life Sciences in the 25 years since its establishment at the Presidency of the Council of Ministers. The themes and issues that your committee faces are of great importance for contemporary man, both as an individual and in the relational and social dimension, starting with the family and also in local and national as well as international communities, and in care for creation.

As we read in the book of Genesis, "the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it" (2:15). Culture, of which you are leading representatives in the field of science and technology of life, carries within it the idea of "cultivation". It expresses well the tension of making grow, bloom and bear fruit, through human ingenuity, what God has placed in the world. We cannot however forget that the biblical text also invites us to "keep" the garden of the world. As I wrote in *Laudato Si'*, "tilling" refers to cultivating, ploughing or working, while 'keeping' means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving. This implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature" (n. 67). Your task is not only that of promoting the harmonious and integrated development of scientific and technological research that relates to the biological processes of plant, animal and human life; you are also asked to predict and prevent the negative consequences

that can result in a distorted use of knowledge and skills to manipulate life.

The scientist, like the technologist, is called to “know” and “know how” with increasing precision and creativity in his or her field of competence and, at the same time, to take responsible decisions on steps to be taken, and those before which it is necessary to stop and take a different road. The principle of accountability is an essential cornerstone of human action, and man must answer for his own acts and omissions before himself, others and ultimately God. Technologies, more even than sciences, put in the hands of man an enormous and growing power. The major risk is that citizens, and sometimes even those who represent them and govern them, do not fully realize the seriousness of the challenges that arise, the complexity of the problems to be solved, and the danger of misusing the power that sciences and the technologies of life put in our hands (see Romano Guardini, *The end of the modern era*, Brescia 1987, pp. 80-81).

Then, when the interplay between technological power and economic power becomes closer, interests can condition lifestyles and social trends in the direction of the profit of certain industrial and commercial groups, to the detriment of the populations and the poorest nations. It is not easy to arrive at a harmonious composition of the different scientific, productive, ethical, social, economic and political interests, promoting sustainable development that respects the “common home”. This harmonious composition requires humility, courage and openness to the comparison between the different positions, in the certainty that the witness given by men of science to truth and the common good contributes to the maturation of social conscience.

At the conclusion of this reflection, let me remind you that the sciences and technologies are made for man and for the world, not the man and the world for science and technology. They are at the service of a dignified and healthy life for all, now and in the future, and make our common home more liveable and supportive, more careful and guarded. Finally, I encourage the efforts of your Committee to initiate and sustain processes of consensus among scientists, technologists, business people and representatives of the institutions, and to identify strategies to enhance public awareness of the issues raised by developments in the life sciences and biotechnology.

May the Lord bless each one of you, your families and your valuable work. I assure you of my remembrance in prayer and I trust that you will pray for me too. Thank you!
