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Apostolic Trip of the Holy Father Francis to Myanmar and Bangladesh (26 November – 2 December 2017) – Meeting with the Authorities, Civil Society and the Diplomatic Corps

Meeting with the Authorities, Civil Society and the Diplomatic Corps

At 17.00 local time (11.30 Rome time) this afternoon, at the *Myanmar International Convention Centre* of Nay Pyi Taw, the Pope met with the authorities, civil society and members of the diplomatic corps.

Upon arrival, the Holy Father Francis was received by the State Counsellor and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi, and some children in traditional dress, belonging to diverse ethnic groups.

After the intervention by the State Counsellor, the Pope addressed those present.

At the end of the meeting, the Holy Father transferred by car to Nay Pyi Taw International Airport, where he was welcomed by a minister delegate of the President.

Then, on board a Myanmar Airways International B737, he returned to Yangon. Upon arrival, he returned by car to the archbishopric.

The following is the address the Holy Father gave at the meeting with the authorities, civil society and members of the diplomatic corps:

Address of the Holy Father

Madam State Counsellor,

Honourable Government and other Authorities,

Your Eminence, My Brother Bishops,

Distinguished Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am grateful for the kind invitation to visit Myanmar and I thank you, Madam State Counsellor, for your kind words. I am very grateful to all who have worked so hard to make this visit possible. I have come, above all, to pray with the nation's small but fervent Catholic community, to confirm them in their faith, and to encourage them in their efforts to contribute to the good of the nation. I am most grateful that my visit comes soon after the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between Myanmar and the Holy See. I would like to see this decision as a sign of the nation's commitment to pursuing dialogue and constructive cooperation within the greater international community, even as it strives to renew the fabric of civil society.

I would also like my visit to embrace the entire population of Myanmar and to offer a word of encouragement to all those who are working to build a just, reconciled and inclusive social order. Myanmar has been blessed with great natural beauty and resources, yet its greatest treasure is its people, who have suffered greatly, and continue to suffer, from civil conflict and hostilities that have lasted all too long and created deep divisions. As the nation now works to restore peace, the healing of those wounds must be a paramount political and spiritual priority. I can only express appreciation for the efforts of the Government to take up this challenge, especially through the Panglong Peace Conference, which brings together representatives of the various groups in an attempt to end violence, to build trust and to ensure respect for the rights of all who call this land their home.

Indeed, the arduous process of peacebuilding and national reconciliation can only advance through a commitment to justice and respect for human rights. The wisdom of the ancients defined justice precisely as a steadfast will to give each person his due, while the prophets of old saw justice as the basis of all true and lasting peace. These insights, confirmed by the tragic experience of two world wars, led to the establishment of the United Nations and the universal declaration of human rights as the basis for the international community's efforts to promote justice, peace and human development worldwide, and to resolve conflicts through dialogue, not the use of force. In this sense, the presence of the diplomatic corps in our midst testifies not only to Myanmar's place in the concert of nations, but also to the country's commitment to uphold and pursue those foundational principles. The future of Myanmar must be peace, a peace based on respect for the dignity and rights of each member of society, respect for each ethnic group and its identity, respect for the rule of law, and respect for a democratic order that enables each individual and every group – none excluded – to offer its legitimate contribution to the common good.

In the great work of national reconciliation and integration, Myanmar's religious communities have a privileged role to play. Religious differences need not be a source of division and distrust, but rather a force for unity, forgiveness, tolerance and wise nation building. The religions can play a significant role in repairing the emotional, spiritual and psychological wounds of those who have suffered in the years of conflict. Drawing on deeply-held values, they can help to uproot the causes of conflict, build bridges of dialogue, seek justice and be a prophetic voice for all who suffer. It is a great sign of hope that leaders of the various religious traditions in this country are making efforts to work together, in a spirit of harmony and mutual respect, for peace, for helping the poor and for educating in authentic religious and human values. In seeking to build a culture of encounter and solidarity, they contribute to the common good and to laying the indispensable moral foundations for a future of hope and prosperity for coming generations.

That future is even now in the hands of the nation's young people. The young are a gift to be cherished and encouraged, an investment that will yield a rich return if only they are given real opportunities for employment and quality education. This is an urgent requirement of intergenerational justice. The future of Myanmar in a rapidly changing and interconnected world will depend on the training of its young, not only in technical fields, but above all in the ethical values of honesty, integrity and human solidarity that can ensure the consolidation of democracy and the growth of unity and peace at every level of society. Intergenerational justice likewise demands that future generations inherit a natural environment unspoiled by human greed and depredation. It is

essential that our young not be robbed of hope and of the chance to employ their idealism and talents in shaping the future of their country and, indeed, our entire human family.

Madam State Counsellor, dear friends:

In these days, I wish to encourage my Catholic brothers and sisters to persevere in their faith and to continue to express its message of reconciliation and brotherhood through charitable and humanitarian works that benefit society as a whole. It is my hope that, in respectful cooperation with the followers of other religions, and all men and women of good will, they will help to open a new era of concord and progress for the people of this beloved nation. "Long live Myanmar!" I thank you for your attention, and with prayerful good wishes for your service to the common good, I invoke upon all of you the divine blessings of wisdom, strength and peace. Thank you.
