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Audience with a delegation of Rabbis of the “World Congress of Mountain Jews” of the Caucasus

At 11.45 this morning, in the Hall of Popes of the Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience a delegation of Rabbis of the “World Congress of Mountain Jews” of the Caucasus.

The following is the Pope’s address to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear Friends,

I offer a warm welcome to you, the delegates of the World Congress of Mountain Jews from different countries. It is the first time that Jewish brothers and sisters belonging to your ancient tradition have come as a group to visit the Pope. For this reason too, our meeting today is a reason for joy.

Most recently, I met with a Jewish community in Lithuania on 23 September last. It was a day devoted to the commemoration of the Shoah, seventy-five years after the destruction of the Vilnius ghetto and the murder of thousands of Jews. I prayed before the monument to the victims of the Holocaust and I asked the Most High to comfort his people. The Holocaust must be commemorated so that there will be *a living memory* of the past. Without a living memory, there will be no future, for if the darkest pages of history do not teach us to avoid the same errors, human dignity will remain a dead letter.

Speaking of the Shoah, I would like to recall two other tragic events. Another dramatic seventy-fifth anniversary took place on 16 October last: that of the raid on the Roman ghetto. Just a few days from now, 9 November will mark the eightieth anniversary of the *Kristallnacht*, when many Jewish places of worship were destroyed, not least with the intent of uprooting from the hearts of individuals and a people that which is absolutely inviolable: the presence of the Creator. The attempt to replace the God of goodness with the idolatry of power and the ideology of hatred ended in the folly of exterminating creatures. Consequently, religious freedom is a supreme good to be safeguarded, a fundamental human right and a bulwark against the claims of totalitarianism.

Sadly, anti-Semitic attitudes are also present in our own times. As I have often repeated, a Christian cannot be an anti-Semite; we share the same roots. It would be a contradiction of faith and life. Rather, we are called to commit ourselves to ensure anti-Semitism is banned from the human community.

I have always sought to emphasize the importance of friendship between Jews and Catholics. It is based on a fraternity grounded in the history of salvation and it finds concrete expression in concern for one another. Together with you, I would like to offer thanks to the Giver of every gift for the blessing of our friendship, which is a reason and an impetus to mutual dialogue. In these times, we are called to promote and to expand interreligious dialogue for the sake of humanity.

In this regard, I readily think back with you to the moving interreligious encounter in Azerbaijan two years ago, where I remarked that the religions can be builders of harmony “based on personal relations and on the good will of those responsible”. This is indeed our path: “a path of dialogue with others and a path of prayer for all. These are our means of turning ‘spears into pruning hooks’ (cf. *Is* 2:4), so as to give rise to love where there is hatred, and forgiveness where there is offence, without ever growing weary of imploring and tracing the ways of peace”. For “now is not the time for violent or abrupt solutions, but rather an urgent moment to engage in patient processes of reconciliation” (2 October 2016). It is to this fundamental task that we are called.

I ask the Almighty to bless our journey of friendship and trust, so that we can dwell always in peace and be, wherever we find ourselves, artisans and builders of peace. *Shalom aleichem!*
