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Apostolic Trip of Pope Francis to Panama for the 34th World Youth Day (23-28 January 2019) – Welcome Ceremony in Panama and courtesy visit to the President of the Republic, Meeting with the Authorities

Welcome Ceremony in Panama and courtesy visit to the President of the Republic in the Presidential Palace

Meeting with the Authorities, the Diplomatic Corps and the Representatives of Civil Society in Palacio Bolívar of Panama

Welcome Ceremony in Panama and courtesy visit to the President of the Republic in the Presidential Palace

This morning, at 9.30 local time (15.30 in Rome), after celebrating Holy Mass in private at the apostolic nunciature in the presence of nunciature staff, with relatives and friends, the Holy Father Francis transferred by car to the Presidential Palace of Panama for the welcome ceremony and courtesy visit to the President of the Republic of Panama, Mr. Juan Carlos Varela Rodríguez.

Upon arrival he was received at the main entrance by the President of the Republic and by his wife. After the photograph, the President accompanied the Pope to the first floor. Before proceeding to the Presidential Office, the Holy Father briefly appeared on the balcony and greeted those present.

After the private meeting with the President and the presentation of the family, the exchange of gifts took place.

At the end, accompanied by the President and his wife, the Pope left the Palace and travelled by car to Palacio Bolívar for the meeting with the authorities, the members of the diplomatic corps and representatives of civil society.

Meeting with the Authorities, the Diplomatic Corps and the Representatives of Civil Society in Palacio Bolívar of Panama

This morning, at 10.40 local time (16.40 in Rome), the Holy Father Francis met with the authorities, the members of the diplomatic corps and representatives of civil society and cultural life in Palacio Bolívar in Panama.

Upon arrival he was received by the President of the Republic of Panama, Juan Carlos Varela Rodríguez, and by the vice-President of the Republic, Isabel de Saint Malo de Alvarado, along with their respective consorts.

After the introductory address by the President of the Republic, the Pope gave his address.

At the end, after taking leave of the President and other authorities, the Holy Father proceeded on foot to the Church of San Francisco de Asís to meet with the bishops of Central America.

The following is the address pronounced by the Pope during the meeting with the authorities, with the members of the diplomatic corps and representatives of civil society:

Address of the Holy Father

Mr President,
Madam Vice President
Distinguished Authorities,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank you, Mr President, for your words of welcome and your kind invitation to visit this nation. In addressing you, I would like to greet and thank all the people of Panama who, from Darién to Chiriquí and Bocas del Toro, have made a marvellous effort to welcome the many young people arriving from all over the world. Thank you for having opened to us the doors of your home.

I begin my pilgrimage in this historical precinct where, as His Excellency the President just reminded us, Simón Bolívar stated that “if the world had to choose its capital, the Isthmus of Panama would be marked out for this great destiny”, and convoked the leaders of his time to forge the dream of the unification of the Great Fatherland. A convocation that helps us realize that our peoples are able to create, to forge and, above all, to dream of a great fatherland that can include, respect and embrace the multicultural richness of each people and culture. Taking up this inspiration, we can look upon Panama as a land of convocation and a land of dreams.

1. Panama is a land of convocation

This was seen in the Congress of Panama and is seen today too in the arrival of thousands of young people who bring with them the hope and desire to meet and celebrate with one another.

Thanks to its privileged location, your country is a strategic enclave not only for the region but also for the entire world. A bridge between oceans and a natural land of encounter, Panama, the narrowest country of the entire American continent, is the symbol of the sustainability born of the ability to create bonds and alliances. This capacity shapes the heart of the Panamanian people.

Each of you has a special place in the building of the nation, and is called to ensure that this land can live up to its vocation to be a land of convocation and encounter. This involves decision, commitment and daily effort to ensure that all have the opportunity to feel that they are agents of their own destiny and that of their families and the entire nation. It is impossible to think of the future of a society without the active – and not merely nominal –

participation of each of its members, in such a way that his or her dignity is acknowledged and guaranteed through access to quality education and the promotion of dignified jobs. These two realities help make it possible to recognize and appreciate the genius and the creative dynamism of this people. Similarly, they are the best antidote to any type of “guardianship” that would restrict your freedom and subordinate or ignore the dignity of citizens, especially that of the most poor.

The genius of these lands is marked by the richness of its indigenous peoples: the bribri, bugle, emberá, kuna, nasoteribe, ngäbe and waunana, who have so much to relate and recall from their culture and vision of the world. I greet them and I thank them. And it continues to be a sign of hope that this World Youth Day started a week ago with the Day of young people from indigenous communities and the Day of young people of African descent. I greet them from here and I thank them that they have taken this first step of the World Youth Day. To be a land of convocation means celebrating, acknowledging and listening to what is specific about each of these peoples and of all those men and women who make up the face of Panama and work to build a future of hope. For it is possible to defend the common good above the interests of a few or for few only when there is a firm decision to share with justice one's goods.

The younger generation, with its joy and enthusiasm, with its freedom, sensitivity and critical capacity, demands that adults, and especially all those who exercise roles of leadership in public life, lead a life consonant with the dignity and authority that they possess and that has been entrusted to them. They call upon them to live in simplicity and transparency, with a clear sense of responsibility for others and for our world. It is a call to lead a life that demonstrates that public service is a synonym of honesty and justice, and opposed to all forms of corruption. Young people demand a commitment in which all – beginning with those of us who call ourselves Christians – have the audacity to build “an authentically human politics” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 73) that makes the person the centre and heart of everything. A politics that works to build a culture of greater transparency between governments, the private sector and the entire population, in the words of your prayer for your country: “Give us our daily bread: may we eat it in our own homes and in a state of health worthy of human beings”.

2. As well as being a land of convocation, Panama is a land of dreams

In these days, Panama will not only be spoken of as a regional centre or strategic site for commerce or the transit of persons: it will turn into a hub of hope. A meeting-point where young people coming from the five continents, brimming with dreams and hopes, will celebrate, meet one another, pray and kindle their desire and commitment to building a more humane world. In this way, they will defy the shortsighted and short-term views that, seduced by resignation or greed, or prey to the technocratic paradigm, believe that the only way forward is to obey the “laws of competition, [speculation] and the survival of the fittest, where the powerful feed upon the powerless” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 53). To believe that would be to close the future to a new imagination of humanity. By welcoming the dreams of these young people, Panama now becomes once more a land of dreams that challenges so many certainties of our time and opens up vital horizons that can enrich the path ahead through a fresh, respectful and compassionate gaze towards others. In these days, we will witness the opening of new channels of communication and understanding, of solidarity, creativity and mutual assistance; channels of humanity that foster commitment and break through anonymity and isolation, for the sake of a new way of building history.

Another world is possible! We know this and young people urge us to take our part in building it, so that our dreams do not remain ephemeral or ethereal, but can promote a social contract in which everyone has the chance to dream of a tomorrow. The right to the future is also a human right.

Against this horizon, the words of Ricardo Miró seem to come alive. In singing to his beloved homeland, he said: “When they see you, my native land, they might say that you were shaped by God's will, so that beneath the sun shining down upon you, all humanity can come together in you” (*Patria de mis amores*).

I renew my gratitude for everything you have done, especially you, Mr President, to make this meeting possible, and I reiterate to Your Excellency, and to all those here present, and all those who join us through the communications media, my best wishes for renewed hope and joy in the service of the common good.

May Our Lady, Santa Maria La Antigua, bless and protect Panama.
