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Message of the Holy Father to the participants in the Assembly of Parties of the IDLO (International Development Law Organization)

The following is the Message sent by the Holy Father to the participants in the Assembly of Parties of the IDLO (International Development Law Organization), taking place today in Rome at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

Message of the Holy Father

Madam Director-General,

Mr President,

Your Excellencies,

distinguished delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I have gladly accepted the invitation extended to me by Madam Director-General, on behalf of the International Development Law Organization (IDLO), to address the Assembly of Parties on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of its founding. I wish to extend my warmest greetings to all participants in this significant meeting, praying that its deliberations will bear fruit that will strengthen the bonds between peoples, safeguard our common home and protect the rights of those whose dignity is violated.

For four decades, this intergovernmental institution has been dedicated to promoting the *rule of law* in order to advance peace and sustainable development, encouraging a variety of initiatives to make justice accessible to all, especially the most disadvantaged in society. Adherence to the principle of equality before the law, the prevention of arbitrariness, the promotion of accountability and the guarantee of transparency, the promotion of

fair participation in the decision-making process, the safeguarding of the principle of legal certainty and respect for due process, both from a substantive and procedural point of view, are all indispensable values and criteria which derive from the general concept of the *rule of law* and which, if implemented, have the power to lead to the achievement of justice. And, it should be remembered, justice is the *conditio sine qua non* for achieving the social harmony and universal fraternity that we so badly need today. It is also the virtue necessary for the construction of a world in which conflicts can only be resolved peacefully, without the right of the strongest prevailing, but by the force of law.

Unfortunately, we are far from achieving this goal. In the complex and challenging environment in which we live, marred by severe interconnected crises, the rise of violent confrontations, the increasingly damaging effects of climate change, corruption and inequalities are painfully evident. It is therefore more urgent than ever to advocate for people-centred justice to strengthen peaceful, just and inclusive societies.

The *rule of law* is never subject to the slightest exception, even in times of crisis. The reason is that the *rule of law* is at the service of the human person and aims to protect his or her dignity, and this does not allow for exceptions. It is a principle. However, it is not only crises that give rise to threats to freedoms and the *rule of law* within democracies. Indeed, an erroneous conception of the human person is becoming more and more widespread, a conception that weakens its very protection and gradually opens the door to serious abuses under the guise of the good.

Indeed, only the law can constitute the indispensable prerequisite for the exercise of any power, and this means that the responsible government bodies must ensure respect for the *rule of law*, regardless of the dominant political interests. When the law is based on universal values, such as respect for the human person and the protection of the common good, the *rule of law* is strong, people have access to justice, and societies are more stable and prosperous. Conversely, without peace and justice, none of the above challenges can be solved. Let us not forget that “everything is connected. Concern for the environment thus needs to be joined to a sincere love for our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of society” (Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*, no. 91).

The *rule of law* can play an essential role in addressing global crises by renewing trust and legitimacy in public governance, combating inequalities, promoting the well-being of people, fostering the safeguarding of their basic rights, encouraging their proper participation in decision-making and facilitating the development of laws and policies that meet their real needs, thus helping to create a world where all human beings are treated with dignity and respect.

I welcome the IDLO's commitment to advancing climate justice and improving land governance and the sustainable use of natural resources. This is also the path to a more just and peaceful world.

Climate change is an issue of intergenerational justice. The degradation of the planet not only prevents a serene and harmonious coexistence in the present, but also greatly undermines the comprehensive progress of future generations. “It is indubitable that the impact of climate change will increasingly prejudice the lives and families of many persons. We will feel its effects in the areas of healthcare, sources of employment, access to resources, housing, forced migrations, etc.”

(Apostolic Exhortation *Laudate Deum*, no. 2). Justice, human rights, equity and equality are fundamentally intertwined with the causes and effects of climate change. By applying a justice-based approach to climate action, we can provide holistic, inclusive and equitable responses.

Corruption erodes the very foundations of society. By diverting resources and opportunities away from those who need them most, corruption exacerbates existing inequalities. This is why awareness-raising campaigns are needed to encourage greater transparency, accountability and integrity everywhere, thereby laying a solid foundation for building a just and virtuous society. It is in early childhood that the seeds of integrity, honesty and moral awareness are sown, fostering a society where corruption does not find fertile ground to take root.

Finally, it is essential to continue to take steps to reach out to the poorest, most marginalized and vulnerable, who often have no one to speak on their behalf and who find themselves rejected and excluded. We must ensure that no one is left behind, especially women, indigenous peoples and young people, who are striving to ensure that their proposals find space and a voice in the present so that they can look to the future with confidence.

Your Excellencies, I am sure that meetings, such as this one, serve to ensure that judicial systems that uphold the primacy of the dignity of the human person over any other type of interest or justification will continue to be strengthened in our times. In this noble cause the Holy See, faithful to the words of Christ who said: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness; blessed are the peacemakers” (*Mt* 5:6,9), stands alongside all those who strive to strengthen the rule of law, human rights and social justice, so that their efforts may discover new paths of hope towards a future of greater solidarity, justice and serenity for all the nations of the earth.

Vatican City, 28 November 2023

FRANCIS
