



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE 28th EDITION OF THE INTERNATIONAL MEETING FOR PEACE
SPONSORED BY THE COMMUNITY OF SANT'EGIDIO**

Peace Is Always Possible — Religions and Cultures in Dialogue

[Tirana, 6-8 September 2015]

Distinguished Representatives of the Christian Churches and Communities and of the Great Religions of the World,

I offer all of you my most respectful greetings and I express my spiritual closeness to the International Meeting for Peace that the Sant'Egidio Community has organized in Tirana.

These meetings follow the footsteps of St John Paul II at the [first historic Meeting at Assisi in October of 1986](#). Since then a pilgrimage of men and women of different religions has developed which, year after year, stops in different cities of the world. While the historical scene changes and people are called to confront profound and sometimes dramatic transformations, one increasingly perceives the necessity for followers of various religions to meet, dialogue, walk together and collaborate for peace, in the “spirit of Assisi”, which refers to the luminous testimony of St Francis.

This year you chose to stop at Tirana, the capital of a country that has become a symbol of peaceful coexistence among different religions, after a long history of suffering. It is a choice that I share, as manifested by [the visit I made to Tirana](#) in September of last year. I chose Albania as the first European country to visit, so as to encourage the path of peaceful coexistence after the tragic persecutions endured by Albanian believers in the last century. The long list of martyrs still speaks today of that dark period, but it also speaks of the strength of the faith that does not let itself be crushed by the vehemence of evil. In no other country of the world was there so strong a decision to exclude God from the life of a people: even a mere religious sign was enough to bring a punishment of prison if not death. This very sad record deeply scarred the Albanian people, until

the moment of their rediscovered freedom, when the members of the different religious communities, tried by the common suffering they endured, met again to live together in peace.

Therefore, dear friends, I am particularly grateful you have chosen Albania. I would like to confirm together with you today what I affirmed last year in Tirana: “A peaceful and fruitful coexistence between persons and communities of believers of different religions is not only desirable, but possible and realistic. The peaceful coexistence of different religious communities is, in fact, an inestimable benefit to peace and to harmonious human advancement. This is something of value which needs to be protected and nourished each day, by providing an education which respects differences and particular identities, so that dialogue and cooperation for the good of all may be promoted and strengthened by mutual understanding and esteem. It is a gift which we need to implore from God in prayer”. (*Address to the Authorities, 21 September 2014*). This is the spirit of Assisi: to live together in peace, recalling that peace and coexistence have a religious foundation. Prayer is always at the root of peace!

And precisely because it has its foundation in God, “peace is always possible,” as the title of your Meeting this year affirms. It is necessary to reaffirm this truth especially today, while in some parts of the world violence, persecution and abuses of power against religious freedom seem to prevail, together with resignation in the face of the conflicts that they cause. We must never be resigned to war! And we cannot remain indifferent to those who suffer due to war and violence. Therefore I have chosen as the topic of the next World Day of Peace: “Overcome Indifference and Win Peace.”

However, it is also violence to erect walls and barriers to block those seeking a place of peace. It is violence to push back those fleeing from inhuman conditions in the hope of a better future. It is violence to exclude children and the elderly from society and from life itself! It is violence to widen the gulf between those who waste what is not needed and those who lack what is necessary!

In our world, faith in God makes us believe and makes us shout that peace is possible. It is faith that drives us to trust in God and not to resign ourselves to the work of evil. As believers we are called to rediscover that universal vocation to peace planted in the heart of our various religious traditions, and to reintroduce it with courage to the men and women of our time. And I confirm what I also said in this connection, again at Tirana, speaking to the religious leaders: “Authentic religion is a source of peace and not of violence! No one must use the name of God to commit violence! To kill in the name of God is a grave sacrilege. To discriminate in the name of God is inhuman” (*Address at the Interreligious Meeting, 21 September 2014*).

Dear friends, it is not a naïve affirmation to hold that peace is always possible; rather, it is the expression of our faith that nothing is impossible for God. We are certainly called to engage, as individuals and communities, in the great work of peace. May a new prophecy of peace set out from the land of Albania, land of martyrs. I join with all of you, so that in the diversity of the

religious traditions, we may continue to live out the common passion for the growth of peaceful coexistence among all peoples of the earth.

From the Vatican, 29 August 2015 Memorial of the Martyrdom of St John the Baptist

Francis

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana