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The Holy See collaborates with the Italian Paralympic Committee in the Rio 2016 Olympics

Vatican City, 12 May 2016 – This morning a press conference was held in the Holy See Press Office to present the project "Casa Italia Paralimpica in Rio 2016". The panel was composed of Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, president of the Pontifical Council for Culture, Luca Pancalli, president of the Italian Paralympic Committee, Marco Giunio de Sanctis, mission head in the Rio Paralympic Games, Msgr. Melchor José Sánchez de Toco y Alameda, under-secretary of the Pontifical Council for Culture, and Fr. Leandro Lenin Silva Tavares of the archdiocese of Rio de Janeiro.

The Casa Italia, a meeting place for the Italian delegation in the Paralympic Games, will become a long-term project thanks to the collaboration between the Holy See and the archdiocese of Rio de Janeiro, as the president of the Italian Paralympic Committee affirmed. The Casa Italia will be located in the Parroquia Imaculada in Rio de Janeiro and will offer practical support to a series of project initiatives. "I thought this was an almost impossible dream, but instead this idea, born of the desire to leave a tangible sign in the territory, found a warm welcome and practical collaboration from the Holy See both in the person of Cardinal Ravasi, whom I will never cease to thank for having believed in this dream, and the archdiocese of Rio de Janeiro, through Archbishop Orani Joao Tempesta and Fr. Silva Tavares, to whom I am profoundly grateful for their collaboration."

Marco Giunio de Sanctis explained that the Parroquia Imaculada was chosen both for the initiatives linked to it and for its vicinity to the Paralympic Village and sites, just six kilometres away, enabling access to the athletes. In this, the fifteenth edition of the Paralympic Games, 4,300 athletes will represent 180 nations, competing in 22 sports across 528 events.

Fr. Leandro Lenin Silva Tavares commented that it will be the first time that a South American country hosts the Olympics and the Paralympics, noting that in 2013 Pope Francis, during World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro, blessed the Olympic and Paralympic flags, emphasising once again the bonds between evangelisation and the world of sport. "The archdiocese of Rio considers this context of celebration to be an opportune moment for evangelisation, for the proclamation of Christian values and the values of the Olympics and of human development."

"Given the recognition of the effort for interreligious dialogue organised by the archdiocese of Rio de Janeiro, the Local Organising Committee Rio2016 has entrusted us with the task of coordinating religious functions in the

athletes' village", he said. "We are in contact with volunteer chaplains and the heads of Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and non-Catholic Christians. We also collaborate with the Italian Paralympic Committee which has constituted the Casa Italia Paralimpica in one of our parishes, thus leaving a legacy in this and other parishes, making it possible for them to offer ways of being linked to parasport activities. This partnership is greatly appreciated, as it touches upon a reality that promotes and requires assistance: people with disabilities. In Brazil, and especially in Rio, we have made great efforts to welcome the disabled, and are able to observe examples of those who work and live in these situations, offering clear teaching of the values of inclusion and embracing important needs in life. The Casa Italia Paralimpica, as part of the activity of the Rio 2016 Olympics, offers us stories rich in values, such as those of the capacity for recovery, perseverance and hope in the face of difficulties."
