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Mission to Aleppo of the secretary delegate of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development

From 18 to 23 January, on behalf of the Holy Father, Msgr. Giampietro Dal Toso, secretary delegate of the Dicastery for Promoting Human Development, visited Aleppo, along with Cardinal Mario Zenari, apostolic nuncio in Syria, and nunciature advisor Msgr. Thomas Habib. It was the first official visit by Representatives of the Holy See after the end of the hostilities in Aleppo.

The delegation was able to meet the Christian communities and their pastors, who expressed their gratitude to the Pope for his constant attention to beloved Syria. In addition, he visited Catholic charitable institutions and a number of refugee camps. In particular, a centre for humanitarian assistance managed by Caritas Aleppo in the Hanano neighbourhood was inaugurated. During their mission he participated in a moment of ecumenical prayer organised on the occasion of the week for Christian unity, and the condition of several Catholic hospitals was evaluated in the light of a future project for their reconstruction and resumption of activity.

Furthermore, there were meetings with representatives of Islam, during which emphasis was placed on the responsibility of religions in educating in peace and reconciliation. During the visit the civil and religious authorities paid homage to the delegation, expressing particular gratitude for the Holy Father's gesture in elevating to the dignity of cardinal the Papal Representative to the country, and acknowledging in this the Pope's special closeness to the afflicted Syrian population.

Finally, the meetings with Catholic charitable entities highlighted the importance of the assistance they provide for the benefit of all the Syrian population. With the support of the universal Church and thanks to the generous contribution of the international community, such aid can be intensified in the future to face the growing needs of the people. Among the immediate emergencies, special attention is to be paid to the need for food, clothing, education, healthcare and housing.