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Message of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue on the occasion of the Buddhist Festival of Vesakh/Hanamatsuri 2017

Vesakh is the most important festival for Buddhists and commemorates the main events in the life of Buddha.

The festival of Vesakh/Hanamatsuri 2017 is celebrated on different dates in the various countries of Buddhist culture, according to their specific traditions. This year the festival will be celebrated in East Asian countries on 3 May and in the majority of countries of Buddhist tradition on 10 May.

For this occasion, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue has sent the following message to Buddhists:

Christians and Buddhists: Walking Together on the Path of Nonviolence

Dear Buddhist Friends,

1. In the name of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, we extend our warmest greetings and prayerful good wishes on the occasion of *Vesakh*. May this feast bring joy and peace to all of you, to your families, communities and nations.
2. We wish to reflect this year on the urgent need to promote a culture of peace and *nonviolence*. Religion is increasingly at the fore in our world today, though at times in opposing ways. While many religious believers are committed to promoting peace, there are those who exploit religion to justify their acts of violence and hatred. We see healing and reconciliation offered to victims of violence, but also attempts to erase every trace and memory of the “other”; there is the emergence of global religious cooperation, but also politicization of religion; and, there is an awareness of endemic poverty and world hunger, yet the deplorable arms race continues. This situation requires a call to nonviolence, a rejection of violence in all its forms.
3. Jesus Christ and the Buddha were promoters of nonviolence as well as peacemakers. As Pope Francis writes, “Jesus Himself lived in violent times. Yet, He taught that the true battlefield, where violence and peace meet, is the human heart: for ‘it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come’ (*Mk 7:21*)” (2017 Message for the World Day of Peace, *Non-Violence: A Style of Politics for Peace*, no. 3). He further emphasises

that “Jesus marked out the path of nonviolence. He walked that path to the very end, to the cross, whereby He became our peace and put an end to hostility (cf. *Eph 2:14-16*)” (ibid.). Accordingly, “to be true followers of Jesus today also includes embracing His teaching about nonviolence” (ibid.).

4. Dear friends, your founder, the Buddha also heralded a message of nonviolence and peace. He encouraged all to “Overcome the angry by non-anger; overcome the wicked by goodness; overcome the miser by generosity; overcome the liar by truth.” (*Dhammapada*, no. XVII, 3). He taught further that “Victory begets enmity; the defeated dwell in pain. Happily the peaceful live, discarding both victory and defeat.” (ibid. XV, 5). Therefore, he noted that the *self-conquest* is greater than the *conquest* of others: “Though one may conquer a thousand times a thousand men in battle, yet he indeed is the noblest victor who conquers himself” (ibid, VIII, 4).

5. In spite of these noble teachings, many of our societies grapple with the impact of past and present wounds caused by *violence and conflicts*. This phenomenon includes domestic violence, as well as economic, social, cultural and psychological violence, and violence against the environment, our common home. Sadly, violence begets other social evils, and so “the choice of nonviolence as a style of life is increasingly demanded in the exercise of responsibility at every level [...]” (*Address of His Holiness Pope Francis on the Occasion of the Presentation of the Letters of Credence*, 15 December 2016).

6. Though we recognize the uniqueness of our two religions, to which we remain committed, we agree that violence comes forth from the human heart, and that personal evils lead to structural evils. We are therefore called to a common enterprise: to study the causes of violence; to teach our respective followers to combat evil within their hearts; to liberate both victims and perpetrators of violence from evil; to bring evil to light and challenge those who foment violence; to form the hearts and minds of all, especially of children, to *love and live in peace with everyone and with the environment; to teach that there is no peace without justice, and no true justice without forgiveness; to invite all to work together in preventing conflicts and rebuilding broken societies; to urge the media to avoid and counter hate speech, and biased and provocative reporting; to encourage educational reforms to prevent the distortion and misinterpretation of history and of scriptural texts; and to pray for world peace while walking together on the path of nonviolence.*

7. Dear friends, may we actively dedicate ourselves to promoting within our families, and social, political, civil and religious institutions a new style of living where violence is rejected and the human person is respected. It is in this spirit that we wish you once again a peaceful and joyful feast of *Vesakh!*

Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran
President

+ Bishop Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, MCCJ
Secretary
