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Message of the Holy Father Francis to participants in the international interfaith meeting “Paths of Peace” (Münster and Osnabrück, Germany, 10-12 September 2017)

The following is the Message that the Holy Father Francis sent to participants in the international interfaith meeting in the spirit of Assisi, “Paths of Peace”, organised by the Sant’Egidio Community and the dioceses of Münster and Osnabrück from 10 to 12 September 2017, which began in the afternoon:

Message of the Holy Father

Distinguished and dear Representatives of the Churches

and Christian Communities, and of the World’s Religions

To all of you I offer cordial greetings and the assurance of my closeness in prayer.

I thank the Dioceses of Münster and Osnabrück, and the Community of Sant’Egidio for bringing you together once more for this international meeting, whose theme is *Paths of Peace*. Last year we celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of this process of peace and dialogue initiated by Saint John Paul II in Assisi in 1986. It remains timely and necessary, as conflicts, violence, terrorism and war increasingly threaten millions of persons, violate the sacredness of human life, and make us all more uncertain and vulnerable.

This year’s theme is an invitation to forge new paths of peace. How greatly this is needed, especially where conflicts seem intractable, where the will to undertake processes of reconciliation is lacking, where trust is placed in arms and not in dialogue, thus leaving entire peoples plunged into a dark night of violence, without hope for a dawn of peace. Yet countless of our brothers and sisters continue to “thirst for peace”, as we affirmed last year in Assisi. Alongside political and civil leaders, who are responsible for promoting peace everywhere, today and in the future, the religions are called, by prayer and by humble, concrete and constructive efforts, to respond to this thirst, to identify and, together with all men and women of good will, to pave tirelessly new paths of peace.

Our *path to peace* is not that of those who profane God’s name by spreading hatred; it has nothing to do with the

bane of war, the folly of terrorism or the illusory force of arms. Ours must be a *path of peace*, uniting “many religious traditions for which compassion and nonviolence are essential elements pointing to the way of life” (cf. *Message for the World Day of Peace*, 1 January 2017, 4). Making space for peace calls for humility and courage, tenacity and perseverance; more than anything else, it demands prayer, since – as I firmly believe – prayer is the taproot of peace. As religious leaders, particularly at this present moment of history, we also have a special responsibility to be and to live as people of peace, bearing insistent witness that God detests war, that war is never holy, and that violence can never be perpetrated or justified in the name of God. We are likewise called to trouble consciences, to spread hope, to encourage and support peacemakers everywhere.

What we may not and must not do is remain indifferent, allowing tragedies of hatred to pass unnoticed, and men and women to be cast aside for the sake of power and profit. Your meeting in these days, and your desire to blaze new paths of peace and for peace, can be seen as a response to the call to overcome indifference in the face of human suffering. I thank you for this, and for the fact that you have gathered, despite your differences, to seek processes of liberation from the evils of war and hatred. For this to happen, the first step is to feel the pain of others, to make it our own, neither overlooking it or becoming inured to it. We must never grow accustomed or indifferent to evil.

Yet the question remains: What can be done to respond to such growing evil? Is it not too strong? Is every effort useless? In the face of such questions, there is the risk of paralysis and resignation. You, however, have embarked upon a journey, and today you gather to offer an answer. Indeed, your very gathering represents a response of peace: no longer are some against others; now all stand beside one another. The religions cannot desire anything less than peace, as they pray and serve, ever ready to help those hurt by life and oppressed by history, ever concerned to combat indifference and to promote paths of communion.

It is significant that your meeting takes place in the heart of Europe, in this year that marks the sixtieth anniversary of the signing in Rome of the founding treaties of the Union. Peace has been at the heart of Europe’s reconstruction following the devastation caused by two disastrous world wars and the terrible tragedy of the Shoah. May your presence in Germany be a sign and a summons for Europe to cultivate peace through a commitment to paving new paths to a solid unity within and a greater openness without. May we never forget that peace is not only the fruit of our human efforts, but of openness to God.

Together let us continue to forge new paths of peace, lighting candles of peace amid the darkness of hatred. May all men and women long “to break through the barriers which divide them, to strengthen the bonds of mutual love, to learn to understand one another, and to pardon those who have done them wrong... May all peoples accept one another as brothers and sisters, and may the peace for which they yearn ever flourish and reign among them” (JOHN XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris*, AAS 55[1963]. 304).

From the Vatican, 28 August 2017

FRANCISCUS PP.
