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Message of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue to Hindus for the Feast of Deepavali

The feast of Diwali is celebrated by all Hindus and is also known as Deepavali, or “oil lamp”. Symbolically based on ancient mythology, it represents the victory of truth over lies, of light over darkness, of life over death, of good over evil.

The celebration itself lasts for three days, marking the beginning of a new year, family reconciliation, especially between brothers and sisters, and adoration of divinity.

This year the feast will be celebrated by many Hindus on 19 October.

To mark the occasion, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue has sent them a Message on the theme: “Christians and Hindus: Going beyond tolerance”.

The Message, signed by the President, Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, and the Secretary, H.E. Msgr. Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, M.C.C.J., was also sent in Hindi.

The following is the full text of the message:

Christians and Hindus: Going beyond tolerance

Dear Hindu Friends,

On behalf of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, we offer cordial greetings to all of you as you celebrate Deepavali on 19 October 2017. May this festival of lights illumine your minds and lives, bring joy to your hearts and homes, and strengthen your families and communities!

We can rightfully acknowledge the many wonderful things that are happening throughout the world, for which we

are very grateful. At the same time, we are also mindful of the difficulties which confront our communities and which deeply concern us. The growth of intolerance, spawning violence in many parts of the world, is one such challenge we face today. On this occasion, therefore, we wish to reflect on how Christians and Hindus can together foster mutual respect among people – and go beyond tolerance, in order to usher in a more peaceful and harmonious era for every society.

Tolerance certainly means being open and patient with others, recognizing their presence in our midst. If we are to work for lasting peace and true harmony, however, tolerance is not enough. What is also needed is genuine respect and appreciation for the diversity of cultures and customs within our communities, which in turn contribute to the health and unity of society as a whole. To see pluralism and diversity as a threat to unity leads tragically to intolerance and violence.

Respect for others is an important antidote to intolerance since it entails authentic appreciation for the human person, and his or her inherent dignity. In the light of our responsibility to society, fostering such respect demands showing esteem for different social, cultural and religious customs and practices. It likewise demands the recognition of inalienable rights, such as the right to life and the right to profess and practise the religion of one's choice.

The path forward for diverse communities is thus one marked by respect. While tolerance merely protects the other, respect goes further: it favours peaceful coexistence and harmony for all. Respect creates space for every person, and nurtures within us a sense of "feeling at home" with others. Rather than dividing and isolating, respect allows us to see our differences as a sign of the diversity and richness of the one human family. In this way, as Pope Francis has pointed out, "diversity is no longer seen as a threat, but as a source of enrichment" (*Address at the International Airport of Colombo*, 13 January 2015). On yet another occasion, the Pope urged religious leaders and believers to have "the courage to accept differences, because those who are different, either culturally or religiously, should not be seen or treated as enemies, but rather welcomed as

fellow-travellers, in the genuine conviction that the good of each resides in the good of all" (*Address to the Participants in the International Peace Conference, Al-Azar Conference Centre, Cairo, Egypt*, 28 April 2017).

We are challenged then to go beyond the confines of tolerance by showing respect to all individuals and communities, for everyone desires and deserves to be valued according to his or her innate dignity. This calls for the building of a true culture of respect, one capable of promoting conflict resolution, peace-making and harmonious living.

Grounded in our own spiritual traditions and in our shared concern for the unity and welfare of all people, may we Christians and Hindus, together with other believers and people of good will, encourage, in our families and communities, and through our religious teachings and communication media, respect for every person, especially for those in our midst whose cultures and beliefs are different from our own. In this way, we will move beyond tolerance to build a society that is harmonious and peaceful, where all are respected and encouraged to contribute to the unity of the human family by making their own unique contribution.

We wish you once again a joyful celebration of *Deepavali!*

Jean-Louis Cardinal Tauran
President

Bishop Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, MCCJ
Secretary
