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Press Conference to announce two simultaneous exhibitions at the Vatican Museums and the Forbidden City, Beijing

At 11.00 this morning, in the Holy See Press Office, a press conference was held to announce the two exhibitions that, from spring 2018, will take place in the Vatican Museums and the Forbidden City in Beijing.

A second press conference to present the exhibitions will be held at the *Diaoyutai State Guesthouse* in Beijing on 27 November.

The speakers at today's conference were: Barbara Jatta, director of the Vatican Museums; Msgr. Paolo Nicolini, delegate for the Administrative-Management sectors of the Vatican Museums; Fr. Nicola Mapelli, curator of the *Anima Mundi* Museum of the Vatican Museums; Zhu Jiancheng, secretary general of the *China Culture Investment Fund*, and Maestro Yan Zhang.

The following are the interventions by Barbara Jatta, Zhu Jiancheng and Yan Zhang:

Intervention of Barbara Jatta

I am particularly glad to open this press conference, thanking all of you for your presence. Special thanks are due to our illustrious guests, or rather I would say our friends from the People's Republic of China, gathered here on such a special occasion.

In the life, complex and fascinating, of an institution as multi-faceted as the Vatican Museums, ordinary activities may at times assume particular tones.

Organizing exhibitions is, in effect, I would say a rather everyday activity for an international museum such as ours. We promote some of them directly: a select few. There are far more, dozens every year, in which we participate in various countries throughout the world. At times we do this simply by loaning works, others as co-

organizers (there comes to mind the current exhibition in Santiago in Chile, which I recently inaugurated in person).

In this respect, there would be no news in the fact that the Vatican Museums are holding an exhibition, and in all probability none of you would be here today.

Our meeting is special, however, for a series of reasons.

First and foremost, because it will be the first time that the Pope's Museums have organized an exhibition with Chinese cultural institutions. This seems to me to be a first fact of primary importance.

Secondly, because it would not really be "one" exhibition, but rather a much wider-ranging project composed of two "corresponding" exhibitions, one in the Vatican and one in China, and this latter will not be limited to one city, but will instead be itinerant. My friends present here on the panel will explain the details, whereas I will limit myself to some brief points.

I believe, however, that the real novelty is the spirit that has inspired us from the beginning, and on whose solid foundations rests this friendship and this relationship with the cultural institutions of China, and which have led to what we will present to you today.

In these months, as this idea gradually took shape, we found ourselves, perhaps unexpectedly, with a shared awareness of the joint task required, more so today than in the past, of realities such as ours: to be able to speak a universal language, that can only be that of beauty, which makes a powerful appeal to harmony and unity.

Beauty is always an extraordinary vehicle for talking, at every latitude and longitude, physical or temporal. Without fear, without barriers. On behalf of humanity, because I believe that beauty, in the broadest sense of the term, is a need we all share.

I think that it is precisely here that we find the key to the success of what in the Vatican Museums we like to define as the "*diplomacy of art*", which is certainly not our own discovery, but which belongs instead to the centuries-long tradition of the Church. However it is up to us today to carry forth and to creatively re-interpret this in constant rapport with the global scenario in front of us. I think that this is what the Holy Father expects of "his" Museums!

I am, therefore, convinced that the activities we will present to you today will bear an abundant harvest and will be a positive sign of hope which, looking around us, we are all in need of.

Intervention of Zhu Jiancheng

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

First of all, I would like to express my sincere thanks to the Vatican promoter of this event for their scrupulous organization and warm hospitality. In particular, I would like to thank Msgr. Nicolini for all that he has done.

I am firmly convinced that the upcoming simultaneous Sino-Vatican Exhibition will start a new chapter in the cultural exchanges between the Chinese people and the Vatican, enabling greater closeness and comprehension between two countries with a profound cultural tradition.

This event has great significance in the promotion of mutual understanding and reciprocal trust between the two

parties.

An ancient Chinese philosopher, Maestro Han Fei Zi (280 B.C. to 233 B.C.) said, “The relations between nations depend upon the closeness between the peoples, and the closeness between peoples depends upon the communication of hearts”. We all know that this is also the thought of Pope Francis.

China has a long history of peace diplomacy. Already 2100 years ago China opened the Silk Road and promoted exchange between eastern and western culture.

Cultural exchange precedes diplomacy. The China Culture Investment Fund was founded in 2011 by the competent governmental departments of the People’s Republic of China, but it is a non-governmental organization dedicated to promoting culture and cultural exchanges with other countries.

It has already carried out a series of significant activities in the field of culture and diplomacy for “world peace”.

On 31 May this year, two large works by Maestro Zhang Yan were donated by us, on behalf of the Chinese people, to the Pope. It was a response to the greeting Pope Francis addressed in 2014 to the Secretary General Xi and to the Chinese people.

We are about to inaugurate the simultaneous Sino-Vatican Exhibition, an event which crosses borders and time and unites cultures, and which will further strengthen the friendship between China and the Vatican, and will favour the normalization of diplomatic relations between China and the Vatican.

Today, in the twenty-first century, we hope that with the impetus of the project “One Belt, one Road” proposed by the president Xi Jinping, we will actively carry out an exchange of culture and art between China and the Vatican. Together we will promote the civilization of all the world and the progress of humanity.

Intervention of Yan Zhang

His Holiness, Pope Francis, Distinguished guests,

Today for me is a great honour, as my works “Nature and Religion” join more significant and symbolic pieces from the Chinese collections of the Vatican Museums and the National Museum of China, which will be exhibited simultaneously at the Vatican Museums and in Beijing.

At this historical moment, of major efforts to develop the civil relations between China and the Vatican, as a member of the 1,38 billion people of Chinese nationality, I would like to express our sincere homage of true friendship to His Holiness Pope Francis and to all those who have contributed to the cultural exchanges. The two exhibitions represent the two extremes of a bridge of dialogue of civilization. As a messenger of this cultural exchange, it is my pleasure and my privilege to transmit the greetings and friendship of the Chinese people.

The Vatican is the fulcrum of faith for a sixth of the world’s population, and it was the heart of the European Renaissance. From the Renaissance, and then with the First Industrial Revolution, and above all at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, the world has experienced a great increase in material wealth and technological progress. And yet on the other hand, the relationship between men, and between man and nature, has never been so strained. Humanity has even developed the capacity to destroy our ecosystem and ourselves. This is true of the 1.2 billion Catholics, the 1.38 billion Chinese and the 7.2 billion inhabitants of our world: we all inevitably face the final challenge posed to the human race. The survival or destruction of life on Earth depends upon our response to this final challenge for humanity.

In 1993, twenty-four years ago, I began a systematic and continuous reflection on these themes, which led me to the realization of more than twenty paintings, including the works *Cradling Arm* and *Iron Staff Lama*, which explore the theme of “Nature and Religion” through the use of the expressive and tolerant strength proper to oil painting, and the focus on the final question of man, which is common to both Chinese and western painting and culture. On 31 May 2017, *Cradling Arm* and *Iron Staff Lama* – the works that best represent my work and reflection over these last twenty years – were offered as a gift to His Holiness Pope Francis as a sign of friendship on behalf of the 1.4 billion Chinese people, and were then generously given by the Holy Father to the Vatican Museums to be included and displayed in the permanent collection.

I produced a charcoal sketch of the Sacred Mountain, which was presented to the Holy Father. At the request of the Vatican Library, I completed the reproduction by creating a painting of the sketch for the Vatican Library collection.

For me, *Kanrenmuqi* is the sacred mountain of all humanity, incorporating the essence of religion. It represents the place of a permanent spirit, that should be eternity, and cannot be destroyed!

The “Father” is love among the faithful, like father and son: white as snow, white also like the Pope’s robe. The mountain is like the body and with the cross it bears.

In the end, I would say that no matter to what country we belong or what belief we profess, “nothing in the world is irrelevant with us”. Mother Earth, which as Pope Francis says in his Encyclical *Laudato si’* is a beautiful mother welcoming us in her arms, shows that the great family of nations can be tolerant and united. Chinese and Vatican cultures too need communication and exchange, as do all the cultures of Earth. The sacred mountain is a natural symbol of the dialogue and civilization of the encounter. Selfless friendship between China and Pope Francis and the idea that we are all a single family will urge men to rethink the relationship between humanity, life, society, and nature. The aesthetics of art will reveal in us the complete awareness of the environment, benevolence and tolerance.

Dialogue between us is possible and inevitable because of our common sense of goodness. In the twenty-first century, the extraordinary plan to build a solid bridge of dialogue between Beijing and the Vatican will make the Silk Road shine once again! May friendship and peace reign in the world!
