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Apostolic Trip of the Holy Father Francis to Myanmar and Bangladesh (26 November – 2 December 2017) – Meeting of the Supreme “Sangha” Council of Buddhist Monks

Meeting of the Supreme “Sangha” Council of Buddhist Monks

In the afternoon, after leaving the archbishopric of Yangon, the Holy Father Francis transferred by car to the *Kaba Aye Centre*, one of the most venerated Buddhist temples in south-east Asia.

Upon arrival, the Pope was welcomed by the Minister for Religious Affairs and Culture, Mr. Thura U Aung Ko. Then, at 16.15 local time (10.45 Rome time), a meeting was held with the Supreme “Sangha” Council of Buddhist Monks.

After entering the Great Hall of the Complex, Pope Francis greeted the President of the State “Sangha” Committee, the Venerable Dr. Bhaddanta Kumarabhivamsa.

After the intervention by the President of the “Sangha”, the Holy Father gave his address.

Subsequently, after the exchange of gifts and the photos, the Holy Father took leave of the President of the “Sangha” and transferred by car to the archbishopric for the meeting with the bishops. Along the way, before arriving in the archbishopric, the Pope made a tour by popemobile of Saint Mary’s Cathedral, where tomorrow he will celebrate Holy Mass with young people.

The following is the Holy Father’s address to those present during the meeting with the Supreme “Sangha” Council of Buddhist Monks:

Address of the Holy Father

It is a great joy for me to be with you. I thank the Most Venerable Bhaddanta Dr Kumarabhivamsa, Chairman of the State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee, for his words of welcome and for his efforts in organizing my visit here today. In greeting all of you, I express my particular appreciation for the presence of His Excellency Thura

Aung Ko, Minister for Religious Affairs and Culture.

Our meeting is an important occasion to renew and strengthen the bonds of friendship and respect between Buddhists and Catholics. It is also an opportunity for us to affirm a commitment to peace, respect for human dignity and justice for every man and woman. Not only in Myanmar, but also throughout the world, people need this common witness by religious leaders. For when we speak with one voice in affirming the timeless values of justice, peace and the fundamental dignity of each human person, we offer a word of hope. We help Buddhists, Catholics and all people to strive for greater harmony in their communities.

In every age, humanity experiences injustices, moments of conflict and inequality among peoples. In our own day these difficulties seem to be especially pronounced. Even though society has made great progress technologically, and people throughout the world are increasingly aware of their common humanity and destiny, the wounds of conflict, poverty and oppression persist, and create new divisions. In the face of these challenges, we must never grow resigned. For on the basis of our respective spiritual traditions, we know that there is a way forward, a way that leads to healing, mutual understanding and respect. A way based on compassion and loving kindness.

I express my esteem for the all those in Myanmar who live in accord with the religious traditions of Buddhism. Through the teachings of the Buddha, and the dedicated witness of so many monks and nuns, the people of this land have been formed in the values of patience, tolerance and respect for life, as well as a spirituality attentive to, and deeply respectful of, our natural environment. As we know, these values are essential to the integral development of society, starting with its smallest but most essential unit, the family, and extending through the network of relationships that bring us together – relationships rooted in culture, ethnicity and nationality, but ultimately in our common humanity. In a true culture of encounter, these values can strengthen our communities and help to bring much needed light to wider society.

The great challenge of our day is to help people be open to the transcendent. To be able to look deep within and to know themselves in such a way as to see their interconnectedness with all people. To realize that we cannot be isolated from one another. If we are to be united, as is our purpose, we need to surmount all forms of misunderstanding, intolerance, prejudice and hatred. How can we do this? The words of the Buddha offer each of us a guide: “Overcome the angry by non-anger; overcome the wicked by goodness; overcome the miser by generosity; overcome the liar by truth” (*Dhammapada*, XVII, 223). Similar sentiments are voiced in a prayer attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi: “Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love. Where there is injury, let me bring pardon... Where there is darkness, let me bring light, and where there is sadness, joy”.

May that wisdom continue to inspire every effort to foster patience and understanding, and to heal the wounds of conflict that through the years have divided people of different cultures, ethnicities and religious convictions. Such efforts are never solely the purview of religious leaders, nor are they the competence of the state alone. Rather, it is the whole of society, all those present within the community, who must share in the work of overcoming conflict and injustice. Yet it is the particular responsibility of civil and religious leaders to ensure that every voice be heard, so that the challenges and needs of this moment may be clearly understood and confronted in a spirit of fairness and mutual solidarity. I commend the ongoing work of the Panglong Peace Conference in this regard, and I pray that those guiding this effort may continue to promote greater participation by all who live in Myanmar. This will surely assist the work of advancing peace, security and a prosperity inclusive of everyone.

Indeed, if these efforts are to bear lasting fruit, greater cooperation between religious leaders will be required. In this, I want you to know that the Catholic Church is a willing partner. Opportunities for religious leaders to encounter one another and to dialogue are proving to be a notable element in the promotion of justice and peace in Myanmar. I am aware that in April of this year the Catholic Bishops' Conference hosted a two-day peace meeting, at which leaders of the different religious communities took part, together with ambassadors and representatives of non-governmental agencies. Such gatherings are essential if we are to deepen our understanding of one another and affirm our interconnectedness and common destiny. Authentic justice and

lasting peace can only be achieved when they are guaranteed for all.

Dear friends, may Buddhists and Catholics walk together along this path of healing, and work side by side for the good of everyone who lives in this land. In the Christian Scriptures, the Apostle Paul challenges his hearers to rejoice with those who rejoice, while weeping with those who weep (cf. *Rom* 12:15), humbly bearing one another's burdens (cf. *Gal* 6:2). On behalf of my Catholic brothers and sisters, I express our readiness to continue walking with you and sowing seeds of peace and healing, compassion and hope in this land.

Once more, I thank you for inviting me to be with you today. Upon all of you I invoke the divine blessings of joy and peace.
