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Message of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue on the occasion of the Buddhist festival of Vesakh/Hanamatsuri 2018

Vesakh is the most important festival for Buddhists: it commemorates the principal events in the life of Buddha.

The festival of Vesakh/Hanamatsuri 2018 is celebrated on different dates in the various countries of Buddhist culture, according to the different traditions. This year the festival will be celebrated in the majority of countries of Buddhist tradition on 29 May.

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

Christians and Buddhists: Preventing and Combating Corruption Together

Dear Buddhist Friends,

On behalf 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, your families and your communities throughout the world.

We wish to reflect this year on the pressing need to promote a culture free of corruption. Corruption involving the abuse of positions of power for personal gain, both within the public or private sectors, has become such a pervasive scandal in today's world that the United Nations has designated 9 December as International Anti-Corruption Day. As the phenomenon of corruption becomes more widespread, governments, non-governmental organizations, the media, and citizens around the world are joining together to combat this heinous crime. As religious leaders, we too must contribute to fostering a culture imbued with lawfulness and transparency.

Pope Francis' monthly prayer intention for February 2018 was "Say 'No' to Corruption." In denouncing "the sin of

corruption,” he recognizes that corruption is found throughout the world among politicians, business executives and clerics. Those who ultimately pay the price for corruption, he observes, are the poor. Recalling the words of Jesus to his disciples, “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant” (Matthew 20:26), the Pope insists, “the only road leading out of corruption [...] is service. Because corruption comes from pride, from arrogance, and service is humbling: it is precisely the humble charity of helping others” (Morning Meditation, Domus Sanctae Marthae, 16 June 2014).

Dear friends, as Buddhists, you regard corruption as an unwholesome state of mind that causes suffering and contributes to an unhealthy society. You identify three principal toxins – greed, hate, and delusion or ignorance - as sources of this social scourge that must be eliminated for the good of the individual and society. The Second Precept of Buddhism, “I undertake to observe the precept to abstain from taking that which is not given,” teaches Buddhists to discern whether those things that come into their possession are indeed meant for them. If such things have been taken from others illicitly, they may not rightfully be kept. Buddhist teachings and practice not only disapprove of corruption but also seek to transform the unhealthy state of mind, intentions, habits and actions of those who are corrupt.

Even though, both our religious traditions firmly denounce the evil of corruption, we sadly acknowledge that some of our followers participate in corrupt practices and this leads to bad governance, corporate bribery and the pillaging of national assets. Corruption puts lives at risks for it is connected to low economic growth, weak investment, inflation, monetary devaluation, tax evasion, great inequality, poor education, sub-standard infrastructure, and the degradation of environment. It also threatens the health and safety of individuals and communities. People are scandalized by incompetent and corrupt politicians, ineffective legislation and the failure to investigate major corruption cases. Populist movements, sometimes motivated and sustained by religious fundamentalism, have arisen to protest the breakdown of public integrity.

We believe that corruption cannot be answered with silence, and that well-intentioned ideas will prove inadequate unless they are applied, and that such implementation is necessary for corruption to be eliminated. We Buddhists and Christians, rooted in our respective ethical teachings, must work together to prevent corruption by eradicating its underlying causes and to root out corruption where it exists. In this effort, our main contribution will be to encourage our respective followers to grow in moral integrity and a sense of fairness and responsibility. Our common commitment to combating corruption must include cooperating with the media and civil society in preventing and exposing corruption; creating public awareness of corruption; holding white-collar criminals who plunder national assets accountable for their actions, regardless of their ethnic, religious, political, or class affiliations; teaching and inspiring all people, but especially politicians and public servants, to act with the utmost fiscal integrity; calling for due legal process to recover assets that are stolen through corruption and bringing to justice those responsible for this crime: encouraging more women to participate in politics: refusing to entrust with public office those engaged in illegal activities; and introducing transparent and inclusive institutions based on the rule of law for good governance, accountability, and integrity.

Dear friends, may we actively commit ourselves to fostering within our families, and social, political, civil, and religious institutions an environment free of corruption by living a life of honesty and integrity. It is in this spirit that we wish you once again a peaceful and joyful feast of Vesakh!

Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran
President

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Secretary