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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 known as Deepavali, or “row of oil lamps”. Symbolically based on ancient mythology, it represents the victory of truth over lies, light over darkness, life over death, good over evil.

The celebration proper lasts for three days, marking the beginning of a new year, family reconciliation, especially between brothers and sisters, and worship of God.

This year the feast will be celebrated by many Hindus on 7 November.

For the occasion, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue has sent them a Message on the theme: *Christians and Hindus: In Defence of the Vulnerable of Society*.

The Message, signed by 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: In Defence of the Vulnerable of Society

Dear Hindu Friends,

The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue sends you most cordial greetings and prayerful good wishes as you celebrate Deepavali on 7 November this year. May the celebrations surrounding this festival strengthen the spirit of friendship and fraternity among you and enhance peace and joy in your families and communities!

We know from news bulletins and web portals, as well as from direct experience, the daily hardships endured by

the vulnerable members of our society: the poor, infirm, elderly, disabled, destitute, abandoned, migrants; those socially, religiously, culturally and linguistically marginalized and excluded; and the victims of abuse and violence, especially women and children. Largely helpless and defenceless, discarded and ignored by a society increasingly indifferent and even callous in the face of human needs and sufferings, the vulnerable everywhere in our time suffer greatly. It is in this troubling context that we wish to share with you a reflection on how we, Hindus and Christians alike, can engage in efforts to defend, protect and assist them.

The moral duty to care for the vulnerable springs from our shared belief that we are all God's creatures and, as a result, brothers and sisters, equal in dignity, with responsibility for one another. It also stems from the realization that we too at times feel vulnerable, looking for someone to offer us a helping hand. A healthy awareness of our common human condition and our moral duty towards others inspires us to promote their cause by doing all that we can to alleviate their sufferings, defend their rights and restore their dignity.

There is no doubt that, in this regard, many praiseworthy efforts are being made by individuals, groups and communities in different parts of the world. Yet given the great numbers of the vulnerable, and the complexities often involved in meeting their needs, those efforts can appear no more than a few drops in a great ocean. Still, opportunities for service are all around us, since the vulnerable can be found in every community and society. Greater efforts, inspired by a sense of solidarity, are needed so that they can feel "the presence of brothers and sisters who are concerned for them, and, by opening the doors of their hearts and lives, make them feel like friends and family" (Pope Francis, Message for the Second World Day of the Poor, 18 November, 2018) In the end, the true measure of civilization of any society is the way it treats its most vulnerable members.

Attentiveness and cooperation are needed, not only to defend the legitimate place and rights of the vulnerable in society, but also to cultivate a culture of care and concern in their regard. In our families too, every effort should be made to ensure that no one feels unwanted, unloved, ignored or left out. Every level of society - especially political and government leaders, and those best equipped to provide practical assistance - needs to display a human face and heart to the vulnerable of our society and to reach out to all those suffering marginalization and oppression. Such generosity should not appear as a token gesture, but as one divinely inspired and aimed at the true emancipation and welfare of the vulnerable and the defence of their cause.

As believers grounded in our own respective spiritual traditions, and as individuals with shared concerns for the wellbeing of all, may we join hands with the adherents of other religious traditions and all people of good will, and make collective and concerted efforts to secure a joyful present and a hopeful future for our vulnerable brothers and sisters!

We wish all of you a happy Deepavali!

Bishop Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, MCCJ
Secretary
