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BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIEGE
PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLS

BOLLETTINO

SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

N. 181109d

Friday 09.11.2018

Message of the Delegation of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue for the 230th Anniversary of the “Royal Temple of Chetupon (Wat Pho)”

The following is the Message of the Delegation of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, led by the Secretary H.E. Msgr. Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, M.C.C.J., in Bangkok on the occasion of the celebrations for the 230th Anniversary of the “Royal Temple of Chetupon (Wat Pho)” taking place from 1 to 11 November 2018:

Message

Most Venerable Phra Thepweeraporn,

The Holy Father Pope Francis was pleased to be informed of the grand festival commemorating the 230th Anniversary of Wat Phra Chetuphon (Wat Pho) from 1 to 11 November 2018. Allow me to bring warm greetings and best wishes in the name of His Holiness Pope Francis, along with those of our delegation, to you and to the Sangha Assembly of the Royal Temple Phra Chetuphon as well as all Buddhists in Thailand on this happy occasion. It is an *honour* and a privilege to be *invited to participate in* this commemorative event and we sincerely express our gratitude for the invitation.

The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue esteems the enduring friendship between the Wat Pho and the Catholic Church. The ties of mutual trust and cooperation between us began with the first delegation of Buddhist monks from Thailand on 5 June 1972 when they had an audience with His Holiness, Pope Paul VI. On this occasion the Pope noted “We hope that there will be increasingly friendly dialogue and close collaboration between the traditions that you represent and the Catholic Church” (*Insegnamenti*, 1972, X, pp. 604-605). One of the three monks of the delegation was Most Ven. Somdej Phra Wanaratana (Pun Punnasiri), former abbot of Wat Phra Chetuphon (Wat Pho), who was later elevated to the 17th Supreme Patriarch of the Kingdom of Thailand. We also vividly remember the recent visit of Ven. Phra Rajratanasunthon and his delegation to the Vatican to present the translations of the Sacred Scriptures Khom of Phra Malai to His Holiness Pope Francis. On this occasion as well, the Pope expressed his sincere appreciation for the Wat Pho. “It is a tangible sign of your generosity and of the friendship that we have shared for so many years, a journey made of many small

steps" (*To the Buddhist Delegation from Thailand*, 16 May 2018).

Our presence today is a clear sign of our bond of friendship. We take this occasion to thank the Sangha Assembly of Wat Pho for their continued commitment to interreligious dialogue. May our visit today contribute to furthering our ties and build bridges to heal today's disturbed world plagued by violence, strife, mistrust, and the resulting suffering to millions of people.

With renewed gratitude for the invitation, we wish you a happy and meaningful cultural and spiritual celebration!

H.E. Bishop Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, M.C.C.J.

Secretary, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue
