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Message of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue for the Feast of Vesakh/Hanamatsuri 2020

Vesakh is the most important festivity for Buddhists, in which the main events in the life of Buddha are commemorated.

The Feast of Vesakh/Hanamatsuri 2020 is celebrated in the various countries of Buddhist culture on different dates, according to the different traditions. This year the Feast will be celebrated in the majority of countries of Buddhist tradition on 6 May.

For this circumstance, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue has addressed the following Message to Buddhists:

Message of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue

Dear Buddhist Friends,

On behalf of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, we extend our heartfelt greetings and good wishes to you and to all Buddhist communities around the world as you celebrate the feast of Vesakh/Hanamatsuri. For the last twenty-four years, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue has sent greetings to you on this happy occasion. Since this year marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of this traditional message, we would like to renew our bond of friendship and collaboration with the various traditions you represent.

This year, we would like to reflect with you on the theme “Buddhists and Christians: Constructing a Culture of Compassion and Fraternity”. We are mindful of the high value our respective religious traditions give to compassion and fraternity in our spiritual quest and in our witness and service to a wounded humanity and a

wounded earth.

The Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together states: “Authentic teachings of religions invite us to remain rooted in the values of peace; to defend the values of mutual understanding, human fraternity and harmonious coexistence”. Meeting the Supreme Buddhist Patriarch in Thailand last November, His Holiness Pope Francis expressed that “we can grow and live together as good “neighbours” and thus be able to promote among the followers of our religions the development of new charitable projects, capable of generating and multiplying practical initiatives on the path of fraternity, especially with regard to the poor and our much-abused common home. In this way, we will contribute to the formation of a culture of compassion, fraternity and encounter, both here and in other parts of the world” (cf. *Visiting the Supreme Buddhist Patriarch*, Bangkok, 21 November 2019).

The Feast of Vesakh/ Hanamatsuri prompts us to recall that Prince Siddhartha set out in search of wisdom by shaving his head and renouncing his princely status. He traded his garments of Benares silk for the simple robe of a monk. His noble gesture reminds us of Saint Francis of Assisi: he cut his hair and traded his fine clothes for the simple robe of a mendicant because he wanted to follow Jesus, who “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave” (*Philippians 2:7*) and had “nowhere to lay his head” (*Matthew 8:20*). Their example and that of their followers inspire us to a life of detachment in view of what is most important. Thus, in consequence, we may more freely devote ourselves to fostering a culture of compassion and fraternity for the alleviation of human and ecological suffering.

Everything is related. Interdependence brings us back to the theme of compassion and fraternity. In a spirit of gratitude for your friendship, we humbly ask you to accompany and support your Christian friends in fostering loving kindness and fraternity in the world today. As we, Buddhists and Christians, learn from one another how to become ever more mindful and compassionate, may we continue to look for ways to work together to make our interconnectedness a source of blessing for all sentient beings and for the planet, our common home.

We believe that to guarantee the continuity of our universal solidarity, our shared journey requires educational process. To this end, a global event will take place on 15 October 2020 on the theme “Reinventing the Global Compact on Education”. “This meeting will rekindle our dedication for and with young people, renewing our passion for a more open and inclusive education, including patient listening, constructive dialogue and better mutual understanding” (Pope Francis, *Message for the Launch of the Global Compact on Education*, 12 September 2019). We invite you to work together with all to promote this initiative, individually and within your communities, to nurture a new humanism. We are also happy to see that Buddhists and Christians are drawing on deeply held values and working together to uproot the causes of social ills in various parts of the world.

Let us pray for all those who are affected by the coronavirus pandemic and for those who are caregivers. Let us encourage our faithful to live this difficult moment with hope, compassion, and charity.

Dear Buddhist friends, in this spirit of friendship and collaboration, we wish you once again a peaceful and joyful feast of Vesakh/Hanamatsuri.
