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Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Francis in Iraq (5 to 8 March 2021) - The Pope's words on the flight from Rome to Baghdad

On the aircraft that carried him to Iraq for his 33rd Apostolic Journey, Pope Francis gave his customary greetings to the media workers who accompanied him on the papal flight.

Introduced by the Director of the Holy See Press Office, Matteo Bruni, the Pope addressed some words to the journalists, reproduced below in full:

Words of the Holy Father

Matteo Bruni:

Good morning, Your Holiness, and good morning to you all. After many months we are once again on a papal flight, fifteen months. In the meantime habits have changed, and this very image says it all [the journalists and the Pope are all wearing face masks]: we must all respect the healthcare measures.

I thank you, Your Holiness, for your wish to be a pilgrim in Iraq, the land of Abraham, with its people, its Christians. You said a few days ago: "One cannot disappoint a people for the second time", and we thank you for your wish to be accompanied by a large group of journalists: it was not to be taken for granted. There are 74 of us, from 15 countries, and for 14 journalists it is their first time on a papal flight. We await the gestures and words of the coming days, and in the meantime, we thank you.

Pope Francis:

Good morning, and thank you for the company. Thank you for coming. I am happy to resume the trips, and this

is an emblematic journey. It is also a duty towards a land that has been tormented for so many years. Thank you for accompanying me. I will try to follow the instruction and not shake hands with anyone, but I do not want to stay far away: I will come round to greet you at closer quarters. Many thanks.

[The Pope makes a “tour” of the journalists].

I wish you a good journey. I would just like to ... They had said to me that it was the birthday of one of you today, but perhaps it was a mistake... And the second thing I would like to say is that there are absences that are keenly felt, and today the role of “dean” of the press corps has pass from Valentina [Alazraki] to [Philip] Pulella. Valentina’s absence makes me rather sad, because she has accompanied us, the Popes, for 40 or 50 years.... But I hope she will be with us on the next journey. And Pulella is our dean for this journey. Thank you!
