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## Message of the Holy Father Francis to the participants in the G20 Interfaith Forum 2021 (Bologna, 12-14 September 2021)

The following is the message sent by the Holy Father Francis to the participants in the *G20 Interfaith Forum 2021*, entitled *Time to Heal – Peace among cultures, understanding between religions*, taking place in Bologna from 12 to 14 September 2021:

### Message of the Holy Father Francis

I extend a cordial greeting to the Participants in the *G20 Interfaith Forum*, which is being held this year in Bologna. I conserve a vivid memory of my visit to the City, characterized, among other things, by the ancient University, “which has always made it open, educating citizens of the world and recalling that the identity to which one belongs is that of the common home, of the *universitas*” (*Meeting with students and the academic world*, 1 October 2017). It is good that you have come together with the specific intention of overcoming particularisms and sharing ideas and hopes: together, religious authorities, political leaders and representatives of the world of culture, you engage in dialogue so as to promote access to fundamental rights, above all religious freedom, and to cultivate the leaven of unity and reconciliation where war and hatred have sown death and lies.

In this, the role of religions is indeed essential. I would like to reiterate that if we want to preserve fraternity on Earth, “we cannot lose sight of Heaven”. But we must help each other to free the horizon of the sacred from the dark clouds of violence and fundamentalism, strengthening ourselves in the conviction that “the *otherness* of God points us towards *others*, towards our brothers and sisters” (*Address at the Interreligious Meeting*, Ur, 6 March 2021). Yes, true religiosity consists in adoring God and loving one’s neighbour. And we believers cannot exempt ourselves from these essential religious choices: rather than demonstrating something, we are called to show the paternal presence of the God of heaven through our harmony on earth.

Today, however, this unfortunately seems to be a distant dream. Rather, a deleterious “climate change” seems to be taking place in the religious sphere: in addition to the harmful changes affecting the health of the Earth, our common home, there are others that “threaten Heaven”. It is as if the “temperature” of religiosity were rising. We

need only think of the outbreak of violence that exploits the sacred: in the last 40 years there have been almost 3,000 attacks and around 5,000 killings in various places of worship, in those spaces, that is, that should be protected as oases of sacredness and fraternity. It is all too easy for those who blaspheme God's holy name by persecuting their brothers and sisters to obtain funding. Again, the inflammatory preaching of those who, in the name of a false god, incite hatred, often spreads unchecked. What can we do in the face of all this?

As religious leaders, I believe that first of all we must serve the truth and declare what is evil when it is evil, without fear or pretence, even and especially when it is committed by those who profess to follow the same creed as us. We must also help each other, all together, to combat the *religious illiteracy* that permeates all cultures: it is a widespread ignorance that reduces the experience of belief to rudimentary dimensions of the human and seduces vulnerable souls into adhering to fundamentalist slogans. Above all, we need to educate, promoting equitable, solidarity-based and integral development that increases opportunities for schooling and education, because where poverty and ignorance reign unchecked, fundamentalist violence takes hold more easily.

The proposal to establish a common memorial to those killed in every place of prayer is certainly to be encouraged. In the Bible, in response to the hatred of Cain, who believed in God and yet killed his brother, causing the voice of his blood to rise from the earth, the question came from Heaven: "Where is your brother?" (*Gen 4:9*). The authentic religious response to fratricide is the search for the brother. Let us preserve together the common memory of our brothers and sisters who have suffered violence, let us help each other with concrete words and gestures to oppose the hatred that seeks to divide the human family!

Believers cannot fight it with the violence of arms, which only generates more violence, in an endless spiral of retaliation and revenge. Instead, what you wish to affirm in these days is fruitful: "We will not kill each other, we will help each other, we will forgive each other". These are commitments that require conditions that are not easy - there is no disarmament without courage, no aid without giving freely, no forgiveness without truth - but which constitute the only possible path to peace. Yes, because the path to peace is found not in weapons, but in justice. And we religious leaders must be the first to support these processes, bearing witness that the capacity to fight evil does not lie in proclamations, but in prayer; not in revenge, but in concord; not in shortcuts dictated by the use of force, but in the patient and constructive force of solidarity. Because only this is truly worthy of man. And because God is not the God of war, but of peace.

Peace, a key word in the current international scenario. A word to which "we cannot be indifferent or neutral". I repeat: "Not neutral, but standing up for peace! That is why we invoke the *ius pacis*, as the right of all persons to settle conflicts without violence. That is why we repeat: no more war, never again against others, never again without others! May the interests and plots, often obscure, of those who fabricate violence, feeding the arms race and trampling on peace through business deals, come to light" (*Meeting*, cit.). Peace: a "fourth P" that we propose to add to people, planet, prosperity, in the hope that the agenda of the next G20 will take it into account in a perspective that is as broad and shared as possible, because only together can we tackle problems that, in today's interconnectedness, no longer concern "someone", but everyone. I am also thinking of the climate and migration. It truly is no longer time for alliances of one against another, but for a common search for solutions to the problems we all face. Young people and history will judge us on this. And you, dear friends, have come together for this reason. So I thank you from my heart and I encourage you, accompanying you with my prayers and invoking the blessing of the Most High upon each one of you.

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 7 September 2021

