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Meeting of the Holy Father Francis with the representatives of religions on the theme “Religions and Education: towards a Global Compact on Education”

The following is the Holy Father Francis’ address to the representatives of religions during the meeting that took place this morning in the Clementine Hall in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, on the theme: “Religions and Education: towards a Global Compact on Education”, as part of the Global Compact on Education, the world event announced by Pope Francis on 12 September 2019 to educate the new generations in fraternity, peace and justice:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters,

I am pleased to welcome you on this significant occasion to promote a Global Compact on Education. On this World Teachers’ Day instituted by UNESCO, we, as representatives of different religious traditions, wish to express our closeness and gratitude to teachers, and at the same time our concern for education.

Two years ago, on 12 September 2019, I appealed to all those engaged in various ways in the field of education to “dialogue on how we are shaping the future of our planet and the need to employ the talents of all, since all change requires an educational process aimed at developing a new universal solidarity and a more welcoming society” (*Message for the Launch of the Compact on Education*).

For this reason, I promoted the initiative of a *Global Compact on Education* in order “to 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”. I invited everyone “to unite our efforts in a broad *educational alliance*, to form mature individuals capable of overcoming division and antagonism, and to restore the fabric of relationships for the sake of a more fraternal humanity”.

If we desire a more fraternal world, we need to educate young people “to acknowledge, appreciate and love

each person, regardless of physical proximity, regardless of where he or she was born or lives” (Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, 1). The fundamental principle “Know yourself” has always guided education. Yet we should not overlook other essential principles: “Know your brother or sister”, in order to educate in welcoming others (cf. Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*; *Document on Human Fraternity*, Abu Dhabi, 4 February 2019); “Know creation”, in order to educate in caring for our common home (cf. Encyclical *Laudato Si*) and “Know the Transcendent”, in order to educate in the great mystery of life. We are concerned to ensure an integral formation that can be summed up in knowledge of ourselves, our brothers and sisters, creation and the Transcendent. We cannot fail to speak to young people about the truths that give meaning to life.

Religions have always had a close relationship with education, accompanying religious activities with educational, scholastic and academic ones. As in the past, so also in our day, with the wisdom and humanity of our religious traditions, we want to be a stimulus for a renewed educational activity that can advance universal fraternity in our world.

If in the past, our differences set us at odds, nowadays we see in them the richness of different ways of coming to God and of educating young people for peaceful coexistence in mutual respect. For this reason, education commits us never to use God’s name to justify violence and hatred towards other religious traditions, to condemn all forms of fanaticism and fundamentalism, and to defend the right of each individual to choose and act in accordance with his or her conscience.

If in the past, also in the name of religion, discrimination was practiced against ethnic, cultural, political and other minorities, today we want to be defenders of the identity and dignity of every individual and to teach young people to accept everyone without discrimination. For this reason, education commits us to accept people as they are, not how we want them to be, without judging or condemning anyone.

If in the past, the rights of women, children and the most vulnerable were not always respected, today we are committed firmly to defend those rights and to teach young people to be a voice for the voiceless. For this reason, education impels us to reject and denounce every violation of the physical and moral integrity of each individual. Education must make us realize that men and women are equal in dignity; there is no room for discrimination.

If in the past, we tolerated the exploitation and plundering of our common home, today, with greater awareness of our role as stewards of the creation entrusted to us by God, we want to give voice to the plea of nature for its survival, and to train ourselves and future generations in a more sober and ecologically sustainable lifestyle. Yesterday I was impressed by something that was said by one of the scientists at our meeting: “My newborn granddaughter will have to live, in fifty years’ time, in an unlivable world, if things continue as they are”. For this reason, education commits us to love *our mother Earth*, to avoid the waste of food and resources, and to share more generously the goods that God has given us for the life of everyone. I think of what one thinker, not a Catholic, used to say: “God always forgives, we occasionally forgive. Nature never forgives”.

Today we want to state that our religious traditions, which have always played a leading role in schooling, from teaching literacy to higher education, reaffirm their mission of integrally educating each individual: head, hands, heart and soul. To think about what we are feeling and doing. To feel what we are thinking and doing. To do what we are feeling and thinking. The beauty and harmony of what it is to be fully human.

Dear brothers and sisters, I thank you for taking part in this meeting. I also thank those who, due to the pandemic, could not be here today. And now I invite you to a brief moment of silence, asking God to enlighten our minds so that our dialogue will bear fruit and help us courageously to pursue the paths of new educational horizons.
