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## **Addresses of the Substitute for General Affairs of the Secretariat of State at the Inauguration of the Pontifical Representation Headquarters in Armenia (Yerevan, 27-29 October 2021)**

### **Address of Archbishop Edgar Peña Parra to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

### **Address of Archbishop Edgar Peña Parra at the inauguration of the headquarters of the Pontifical Representation**

The following are the addresses given yesterday by Archbishop Edgar Peña Parra, Substitute for Foreign Affairs of the Secretariat of State, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia and at the inauguration ceremony of the headquarters of the Pontifical Representation of the Republic of Armenia, taking place in Yerevan from 27 to 29 October 2021:

### **Address of Archbishop Edgar Peña Parra to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

Foreign Minister,

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank His Excellency Ararat Mirzoyan, Minister of Foreign Affairs, for his kind words and for making it possible for us to have this high-level meeting, which confirms the relationship of cooperation and friendship that has always existed between the Holy See and the Republic of Armenia. I bring greetings from Pope Francis, who has vivid memories of his Visit to this country in 2016 and of his recent meeting in the Vatican with President Armen Sarkissian and His Holiness Karikin II, Catholicos of All Armenians.

As you know, the purpose of my coming is the inauguration of the Apostolic Nunciature, the Holy See's Embassy

in Yerevan. I am grateful to the President of the Republic and the Government, who, through the good offices of Ambassador Garen Nazarian, urged the Holy See to open a diplomat representation in Armenia. I am likewise grateful to the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop José Bettencourt, for his work in establishing this new office. Notwithstanding the scarcity of resources and available personnel, the project came to fruition in a matter of months because all of us believed in it. I am certain that this Apostolic Nunciature will be for Armenia and the wider international community a symbol of the need to build bridges, to create opportunities for encounter and to open new pathways for a just and lasting peace in this region. Next year marks the thirtieth anniversary of the reestablishment of bilateral relations between the Republic of Armenia and the Holy See. May this edifice enhance the latter's diplomatic mission to the civil and government authorities, foster fraternity and friendship with the Armenian Apostolic Church, and strengthen communion within the local Catholic community with its different rites.

Today's event also testifies to the esteem of the Successor of Peter and the Catholic Church for this noble land, which is home to a portion of that ancient people which was the first to embrace the Christian faith. The friendship and cooperation that exist between the Holy See of Rome and the Holy See of Etchmiadzin are well known. We are committed to pursue this path in working together for the common good and for the integral development of the Armenian people. The Catholic Church, in her different rites, is present in this land through a variety of social, educational and charitable activities. I think in particular of the Redemptoris Mater Hospital in Ashotzk, established in 1991 at the behest of Saint John Paul II following the devastating earthquake of 1988; Caritas Armenia, which operates in 52 social service-health centers throughout the country; and the promotion of Armenian traditions and literature carried out generously and effectively by the Mechitarist Fathers. I might also add the two centres for the handicapped run by the Sisters of Charity of Mother Teresa of Calcutta in Yerevan and Spitak. For decades, these entities have actively operated in Armenian society and contributed to its ongoing progress, albeit occasionally requiring a clearer juridical status and guidelines for their operation and activities. The physical presence of the Apostolic Nunciature will certainly prove helpful in resolving eventual issues and finding satisfactory solutions through appropriate legal means.

Lastly, but certainly not least importantly, I would like to reaffirm the Holy See's support for the matters on the agenda of the Armenian government and the international community concerning peace and disarmament, human rights, human and cultural development, religious liberty, and the protection and safeguarding of the environment.

In conclusion, I once more thank the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the government and the Armenian civil authorities for these meetings. I voice my prayerful hope that the entire nation will enjoy lasting peace and authentic social progress, in continuity with the Christian roots to which your ancestors have borne witness over the ages. Thank you!

**Address of Archbishop Edgar Peña Parra at the inauguration of the headquarters of the Pontifical Representation**

Foreign Minister,

Your Beatitude,

Your Excellencies,

Distinguished Civil, Military and Ecclesiastical Authorities,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to begin by conveying the cordial greetings and spiritual closeness of His Holiness Pope Francis to

all present. To do so is only fitting since this new Apostolic Nunciature serves as a clear sign of the Holy Father's solicitude and concern for the people of this noble country. For this reason, an Apostolic Nunciature is often called the Pope's house. I have been told that the Redemptoris Mater Hospital in Ashotsk is informally referred to as the "Pope's Hospital". Now we can truly say that the Holy Father also has a House in Armenia. It is Pope Francis' desire that this new House will assist the Apostolic Nuncio in carrying out his mission to the Republic of Armenia and to the local Christian community.

The inauguration of this building demonstrates the solid bilateral relations that already exist between the Republic of Armenia and the Holy See. Just a few years ago, Armenia made the welcome decision to open an Embassy to the Holy See and to appoint a residential Ambassador. Today, the Holy See gladly reciprocates that gesture in the hope that our diplomatic ties will continue to deepen.

In this regard, I would like to reiterate the Holy Father's gratitude for the recent visit to the Vatican of His Excellency Armen Sarkissian, President of the Republic. I would also like to highlight the significant anniversaries that occurred this year: the thirtieth anniversary of Armenia's independence, the twentieth anniversary of Saint Pope John Paul II's visit to Armenia and the fifth anniversary of Pope Francis' Apostolic Visit. In the near future, we will mark the thirtieth anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Armenia and the Holy See and the appointment of the first Apostolic Nuncio in 2022 and 2023 respectively.

The good bilateral relations between the Republic of Armenia and the Holy See are due in no small part to our mutual appreciation for the positive role that religion plays in civil society. Armenians are a people of profound faith and this country will always have the distinction of being the first nation to have embraced the Christian faith. Since that time, the Christian faith has sustained this great people, especially during difficult moments of their history. As a source of strength and perseverance through good times and bad, the Christian faith helped form the rich spiritual and cultural heritage of Armenia that remains a source of pride today and will continue to inspire and enrich the lives of future generations of Armenians.

This legacy of Christian faith brings to mind the words spoken by Pope Francis during his Visit to Armenia. The Holy Father stated, "The history of your country runs parallel to its Christian identity preserved over the centuries. That Christian identity, far from impeding a healthy secularity of the state, instead requires and nourishes it, favouring the full participation of all in the life of society, freedom of religion and respect for minorities" (Meeting with Civil Authorities and the Diplomatic Corps, 24 June 2016). With such a rich culture steeped in tradition, not to mention the experiences of pain and suffering brought about by discrimination and persecution, Armenia has many valuable lessons to teach the international community in this regard. The Holy See looks forward with great anticipation to its continued bilateral cooperation with Armenia on many issues, especially those concerning the free expression of religion and the dignity of all human life, so that we learn from history and avoid repeating some of its darkest chapters.

On this joyous occasion, my thoughts naturally turn to the Armenian Apostolic Church. During his Visit, Pope Francis spoke of the Ecumenical Prayer Vigil for Peace as an opportunity "to confirm the apostolic communion" existing between the Armenian Apostolic Church and the Catholic Church as both Churches continue their journey together in the hope of one day gathering around the altar of Christ's sacrifice in the fullness of Eucharistic communion. May this new House of the Pope in Armenia be seen as yet another affirmation of our communion and take us one-step closer to the realization of the Lord's desire for unity among his followers.

As the House of the Pope in Armenia, the Apostolic Nunciature also manifests the Holy Father's pastoral care for the local Catholic community. Although numerically small, the significant impact that the local Catholic Church has on Armenian society through its various health and charitable services is a clear sign of its commitment to serve all those in need. It is my hope that Catholics will see in this new Nunciature a sign of the Holy Father's closeness to them and a strong encouragement to live their faith with joy and in communion with our brothers and sisters of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

In conclusion, I would like to express my gratitude to all for your presence on this special occasion, especially to

the honorable civil and religious authorities and distinguished members of the Diplomatic Corps. I am particularly grateful to His Excellency Archbishop José Bettencourt, Apostolic Nuncio, together with his staff, for all the time and effort dedicated to making this desire of the Holy Father a reality. Thank you for your kind attention and please know once again of the Holy Father's spiritual closeness as we open his House in Armenia.

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