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Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Francis in Kazakhstan – Official Welcome at Nur-Sultan Airport, Welcome Ceremony at the Presidential Palace, Courtesy Visit to the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan and Meeting with the Authorities, Civil Society and the Diplomatic Corps at the Qazaq Concert Hall

Official Welcome at Nur-Sultan Airport

Welcome Ceremony at the *Ak Orda* Presidential Palace

Courtesy Visit to the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan at the Presidential Palace

Meeting with the Authorities, Civil Society and the Diplomatic Corps at the Qazaq Concert Hall

Official Welcome at Nur-Sultan Airport

Upon arrival at Nur-Sultan International Airport at around 17.20 (approximately 13.20 in Rome), the Holy Father Francis was welcomed by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, His Excellency Mr. Kassym-Jomart K. Tokayev. Two young people in traditional costume offered flowers. Then, after the presentation of the delegations and the Guard of Honour, the President of the Republic accompanied the Holy Father to the airport VIP Lounge, where a brief meeting took place.

Pope Francis then transferred by car to the *Ak Orda* Presidential Palace for the welcome ceremony.

Welcome Ceremony at the *Ak Orda* Presidential Palace

At 18.30 (14.30 in Rome), the welcome ceremony took place at the *Ak Orda* Presidential Palace.

Upon arrival, the Holy Father was received in the courtyard of the Palace of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, His Excellency Mr. Kassym-Jomart K. Tokayev. Then, after the Guard of Honour, the anthems and the presentation of the respective delegations, the Pope and the President of the Republic proceeded to the East Hall of the Palace for the private meeting.

Courtesy Visit to the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan at the Presidential Palace

At 18.45 (14.45 in Rome), the Pope paid a courtesy visit to the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, His Excellency Mr. Kassym-Jomart K. Tokayev.

After the official photograph, the private meeting took place. At the end, after leaving the Presidential Palace, the Holy Father Francis transferred by car to the *Qazaq Concert Hall* for the meeting with the authorities, civil society and the Diplomatic Corps.

Meeting with the Authorities, Civil Society and the Diplomatic Corps at the Qazaq Concert Hall

At 19.30 (15.30 in Rome), the Holy Father Francis met with the authorities, civil society and the Diplomatic Corps in the Auditorium of the Qazaq Concert Hall.

After the greeting of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, His Excellency Mr. Kassym-Jomart K. Tokayev, Pope Francis delivered an address.

At the end of the meeting, after taking leave of the President of the Republic, the Holy Father transferred by car to the apostolic nunciature of Kazakhstan.

The following is the address delivered by the Pope during the meeting with the Authorities, Civil Society and the Diplomatic Corps:

Address of the Holy Father

Mr President of the Republic,
Honourable Members of Government and the Diplomatic Corps,
Distinguished Religious and Civil Authorities,
Representatives of Civil Society and the World of Culture,
Ladies and Gentlemen!

I offer you a cordial greeting and I thank the President for his kind words. I am honoured to be here with you, in this land as vast as it is ancient. I have come here as a pilgrim of peace, seeking dialogue and unity. Our world urgently needs peace: it needs to recover harmony. A harmony that, here in this country, can be illustrated by what I have learned is one of its traditional musical instruments: the *dombra*. The *dombra* is a hallmark of your culture and one of the most important symbols of Kazakhstan, so much so that a specific day was recently set aside to honour it. I would like to use the *dombra* as a starting-point for what I wish to share with you today.

In preparing for this journey, I also learned that some versions of the *dombra* were already in use during the Middle Ages and that, down the centuries, it accompanied the recitation of sagas and poetry, linking the past to the present. As a symbol of continuity in diversity, its rhythm accompanies your country's memory; it thus serves

as a reminder of how important it is, amid today's rapid economic and social changes, not to neglect the bonds that connect us to the lives of those who have gone before us. I think particularly of those traditions that enable us to cherish the past and to value the rich inheritance we have received. Here I think, for example, of your fine popular tradition of cooking on Friday mornings seven loaves in honour of your ancestors.

The memory of your country, which Pope John Paul II, as a pilgrim to Kazakhstan, defined as a "land of martyrs and of believers, land of deportees and of heroes, land of intellectuals and artists" (*Address at Welcome Ceremony*, 22 September 2001), embraces a glorious history of culture, humanity and suffering. How can we fail to recall in particular the prison camps and the mass deportations that witnessed, in the cities and in the boundless steppes of these regions, the oppression of so many peoples? Yet Kazakhs did not let themselves remain prisoners of these injustices: the memory of your seclusion led to a deep concern for inclusion. In this land, traversed from ancient times by great displacements of peoples, may the memory of the sufferings and trials you endured be an indispensable part of your journey towards the future, inspiring you to give absolute priority to human dignity, the dignity of every man and woman, and of every ethnic, social and religious group.

To return to the *dombra*: it is played by plucking its two cords. Kazakhstan is known for its capacity to keep creating harmony between "two parallel strings": temperatures that are as frigid in winter as they are torrid in summer; and between tradition and progress, as symbolized by the encounter between historic cities and modern cities like this capital. Above all, in this country we can hear the "notes" of two souls, Asiatic and European, which give it a permanent "mission of linking two continents" (ID., *Address to Young People*, 23 September 2001); of being "a bridge between Europe and Asia", and "a junction between East and West" (ID., *Departure Ceremony*, 25 September 2001). The strings of the *dombra* are usually heard alongside other stringed instruments typical of these places: a reminder that harmony grows and matures in togetherness, in the choral unity that leads to a "symphonic" social life. A fine local proverb states that, "unity is the source of success". If that is true everywhere, here it is true in a very particular way. The 550 ethnic groups and the over 80 languages present in the country, with their diverse histories and cultural and religious traditions, represent an extraordinary "concert"; they make Kazakhstan a unique multiethnic, multicultural and multi-religious laboratory and disclose its particular vocation, that of being *a country of encounter*.

I have come here to emphasize the importance and the urgency of this aspect of encounter, to which the religions are called especially to contribute. I will have the honour of taking part in the Seventh *Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions*. Fittingly, the Constitution of Kazakhstan, in defining it as a secular state, provides for freedom of religion and belief. A healthy secularity, one that acknowledges the important and indispensable role of religion and resists the forms of extremism that disfigure it, represents an essential condition for the equal treatment of each citizen, while fostering a sense of loyalty to the country on the part of all its ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious groups. Religions, while carrying out their irreplaceable role of seeking and witnessing to the Absolute, require freedom of self-expression. Religious freedom represents the best channel for civil coexistence.

This requirement is evoked by the very name of your people, for the word "Kazakh" refers to walking in freedom and independence. The defence of freedom, an aspiration inscribed in the heart of each person, the sole condition for an authentic encounter between individuals and groups, is expressed in civil society chiefly by *the recognition of rights, accompanied by duties*. In this regard, I wish to express appreciation for the affirmation of the value of human life embodied by the abolition of the death penalty in the name of each human being's right to hope. Together with this, it is important to guarantee freedom of thought, conscience and speech, in order to enable each individual to play his or her unique and equal role in service to society as a whole.

Here too, the *dombra* can assist our reflection. It is for the most part a popular musical instrument and, as such, bespeaks the beauty of preserving the genius and spirit of a people. This is first the task of the civil authorities, who are primarily responsible for the advancement of the common good, and finds expression above all in support for democracy, which constitutes the most suitable form for translating power into service to the entire people and not simply to a few. I know that, especially in recent months, a process of democratization has been initiated, with the aim of strengthening the competences of the Parliament and of the local authorities and, more generally, a greater distribution of power. This is a meritorious and demanding process, and certainly not a short-term one, that requires persevering towards the goal without turning back. Indeed, trust in those who

govern increases when promises are not simply a means to an end, but are effectively implemented.

Democracy and modernization everywhere must be more than fine words; they must be embodied in concrete service to people: a “good politics”, born of listening to people and responding to their legitimate needs, constant engagement with civil society and nongovernmental and humanitarian organizations, and particular concern for workers, young people and the more vulnerable sectors of society. Every country in the world likewise needs measures to combat corruption. This truly democratic political “style” is the most effective response to possible cases of extremism, personalism and populism that threaten the stability and welfare of peoples. I think too of the need for economic security, which here at the beginning of the year was called for in areas that, despite the presence of significant energy resources, are facing various difficulties. This is a challenge that concerns Kazakhstan but also the world as a whole, in which integral development is held hostage by widespread injustice, whereby resources are unequally distributed. It is the task of the State, but also of the private sector, to treat all groups in society with justice, with equality of rights and duties, and to promote economic development not on the basis of the profits of a few, but of the dignity of each worker.

Let us return to the dombra – they will say that this Pope is a musician! The dombra unites Kazakhstan to its neighbours in surrounding countries and helps to spread its culture in the world. I express my hope that the name of this great country may continue to be a synonym of harmony and peace. Kazakhstan represents a significant geopolitical crossroads, and so it has a fundamental role to play in lessening cases of conflict. Pope John Paul II came here to sow seeds of hope immediately after the tragic attacks of 2001. I am visiting you in the course of the senseless and tragic war that broke out with the invasion of Ukraine, even as other conflicts and threats of conflict continue to imperil our times. I have come to echo the plea of all those who cry out for peace, which is the essential path to development for our globalized world. And this is peace: a path of integral development for our globalized world.

The need to expand the efforts of diplomacy to promote dialogue and encounter thus becomes all the more pressing, since nowadays the problem of one is the problem of all, and those who hold greater power in the world have greater responsibility with regard to others, especially those countries most prone to unrest and conflict. This should be our concern, not merely our own individual interests. Now is the time to stop intensifying rivalries and reinforcing opposing blocs. We need leaders who, on the international level, can enable peoples to grow in mutual understanding and dialogue, and thus give birth to a new “spirit of Helsinki”, the determination to strengthen multilateralism, to build a more stable and peaceful world, with an eye to future generations. For this to happen, what is needed is understanding, patience and dialogue with all. I repeat: with all.

Thinking specifically of global commitment to peace, I express deep appreciation for this country’s decisive repudiation of nuclear weapons and its efforts to develop energy and environmental policies centred on decreased dependence on carbon fuel and on investment in clean sources of energy, the importance of which was emphasized by the International Exhibition held here five years ago. Together with a commitment to interreligious dialogue, these are concrete seeds of hope sown in the common soil of humanity; it is up to us to cultivate those seeds for the sake of coming generations, for the young, whose desires must be seriously considered as we make decisions affecting the present and the future. The Holy See is at your side in this pursuit: immediately after the country’s independence thirty years ago, diplomatic relations were established and now, as this anniversary approaches, I am happy to be able to visit this country. I assure you of the desire of Catholics, who have been present in central Asia from ancient times, to continue to testify to the spirit of openness and respectful dialogue that distinguishes this land. And they do so without a spirit of proselytism.

Mr President, dear friends, I thank you for your kind welcome, which demonstrates your celebrated sense of hospitality, as well as for the opportunity to spend these days in fraternal dialogue with the leaders of many religions. May the Most High bless the vocation of peace and unity proper to Kazakhstan, the country of encounter. To you who have primary responsibility for the common good, and to all the people of the nation, I express my joy at being here and my readiness to accompany with prayer and closeness every effort being made to ensure the prosperous and harmonious future of this great country. *Raqmét* [Thank you]! God bless Kazakhstan!

