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Presentation of the Holy Father Francis' Message for the 56th World Day of Peace

This morning, at 10.00, the presentation of the Holy Father Francis' Message for the 56th World Day of Peace, on the theme "*No one can be saved alone. Combatting Covid-19 together, embarking together on paths of peace*", to be held on 1 January 2023, was livestreamed from the San Pio X Hall, Via dell'Ospedale 1.

The speakers were: His Eminence Cardinal Michael Czerny, S.J., prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development; Sr. Alessandra Smerilli, F.M.A., secretary of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development; Dr. Maximo Torero, chief economist of the FAO, who sent a video message; and Mr. Simone Cristicchi, singer-songwriter, author, director and theatre actor, who will perform a piece from his musical repertoire.

The following are their interventions:

Intervention of His Eminence Cardinal Michael Czerny, S.J.

In the early days of the pandemic, the world was under enormous stress. The mortality rate quickly became very high, especially among the most vulnerable. Yet we had so little:

·no sound information about the disease

·no treatments

·no strategies for prevention

The world needed a well-supported international plan to deal with the pandemic. That was utterly lacking. Instead, massive misinformation, finger-pointing, false claims and panic-mongering prevailed; while decision-makers gave higher priority to the claims of patent-holders than to people's needs around the world.

In *Fratelli tutti*, issued during the first year of the crisis (October 2020), Pope Francis explained why he established the Vatican's Covid-19 Commission involving the Secretary of State, the Dicastery for Communications and, as coordinator, the Dicastery for Integral Human Development. It was his desire that the Church be of service to the world in the pandemic, to help us all respond "as a single human family, as fellow travelers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth which is our common home, each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, each of us with his or her own voice, siblings all" (FT 8).

With this 2023 Message, which reflects back on Covid and looks ahead towards peace, the Covid-19 Commission has accomplished its work, and the concerns will be re-assumed by the participating Dicasteries.

Today the 2023 Peace Message invites us to ask:

·What have we learned from Covid?

·What lessons can we learn from this moment of crisis?

·What signs of life and hope can we collect despite this difficult time?

·After all we have suffered, what should be our vision of humanity and of society for the future?

·What are Covid-time's lessons for peace?

"Let our hearts be changed by the emergency that we have lived through" Pope Francis urges, and "put the word *together* back in the centre."

Intervention of Sr. Alessandra Smerilli, F.M.A.

No one is saved alone. With the message for GMP 2023, Pope Francis wants us to look back to the frightening, hard and painful times of the beginnings of the Covid-19 pandemic, and asks us to reflect courageously on what we have learnt and what opportunities we have failed to seize. You cannot come out of a crisis the same as before, the Pope told us from the beginning: you either emerge better or worse. This is the time to ask ourselves, as individuals and as a community: three years later, are we better or worse off?

In March 2020, Pope Francis established the Vatican Commission for Covid-19, entrusting it with a task that he already saw far ahead: "Preparing the future". He told us: "I am thinking about what comes next, about the future and the economic and social consequences. The future has memory. I ask you to prepare the future in two ways: with positive science and with imagination, to come out of this labyrinth from above".

At the end of the year 2022, the Commission will close its work: not because the emergency is over, but because by now the entire Dicastery for the Service of Integral Human Development will work in the manner in which the Commission has worked, that is, in listening and direct dialogue with the Churches and the local realities of every Continent and in collaboration with other Organisms and Dicasteries.

With regard to peace, based on the model of the Covid Commission, the working group "Catholic Response for Ukraine" (CR4U), organized by our Dicastery, was also born. This group was set up as a space for structured dialogue and coordination between the many Catholic actors who are doing their utmost to assist the Ukrainian population in their most pressing needs. Indeed, Pope Francis had asked us for "concreteness", and we will try to continue on this path. In the context of the pandemic, "concreteness" was the help given to those who needed it most in the most difficult moments of the emergency, for example through the "Sister Ambassadors network" project, which recognized many women religious as reliable leaders in their communities in matters of health, at

a time when the communities themselves were immersed in so much confusion.

The pandemic has revealed social inequalities and fragilities more acutely, and has undermined peace in many places throughout the world. This has committed the Commission and Dicastery to work in accordance with the priorities the Holy Father has assigned to us: health, employment, and food. With one insistence: “for all”. And this is why I am now handing over to Maximo Torero, chief economist of the FAO, with whom we have worked a great deal on matters of food security.

Video Message of Dr. Maximo Torero

It is a pleasure for me to provide some reflections on the message of his Holiness the Pope on the World Day of Peace. That fundamental right to which every one of us is entitled — to be free from hunger — is at risk today as never before. Amid multiple global crises, such as moral, social and political crises, climate change, pandemics and conflicts, growing inequalities and gender-based violence, more and more people are falling into the hunger trap.

As many as 828 million people faced hunger in 2021, an increase of 150 million since 2019, before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Most recent projections indicate that more than 670 million people could still not have enough to eat in 2030.

This is a far cry from the “zero hunger” target that the world ambitiously committed to less than a decade ago. It also shows just how deep are the inequalities in societies across the world.

There is enough food to feed everyone in the world today. What is lacking is the capacity to buy food that is available because of high levels of poverty, inequalities, conflict and war. Slowdowns and downturns and climate are at the centre of the current and past food crises. The war in Ukraine has made things worse. It shocked the global energy market, which has caused food prices to surge even more. This year alone saw an increase of \$25 billion in food import bills of the world’s 62 most vulnerable countries, a 39% increase relative to 2020.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, a health crisis rapidly evolved into a food crisis, as the virus caused a shortage of farm workers and threatened to break down food supply chains. It taught us the importance of understanding the interlinked challenges of meeting growing food demand while protecting environmental, social and economic sustainability, as envisaged under the Sustainable Development Goals.

Eighty percent of the global poor live in rural areas and rely on farming to survive. Many of them — women, children, indigenous people and people with disabilities — don’t have access to food and are struggling with poor harvest, expensive seeds and fertilizers, and lack of financial services. They are directly affected by the risks and uncertainties facing our agrifood systems.

The gravity of the situation demands a holistic approach to tackle the hunger problem. We must understand that these crises are interconnected. We must understand we all need each other and, if we don’t act with fraternity and solidarity, we won’t be able to resolve the tremendous challenges we are facing today. As the Pope says, we need “together” at the centre.

It means that we must take a human rights-based approach so as to apply human rights principles in our efforts. International frameworks provide legal and policy guidance to achieve universal, fundamental human rights.

The United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, for example, states that the right to food is indispensable for the fulfilment of other human rights. It emphasizes sustainability in that food must be accessible for both present and future generations. From availability, accessibility and healthy diets to food safety, consumer protection and the obligation of states to provide adequate food to their populations, it provides

the foundation upon which to rebuild our agrifood systems.

Since human rights are indivisible and interdependent, one human right cannot be enjoyed fully unless other human rights are also fulfilled. Advocating policies that promote other human rights

— like health, education, water and sanitation, work and social protection — can positively impact the right to food as well. All of them are interconnected.

Let us remember the critical role the right to food plays, let us understand that if we are not together we won't be able to solve our challenges. Let us understand that being together means fraternity and solidarity. This is the only way we can overcome the most painful conditions. We all need each other and we must follow these important principles. But without applying these principles, we cannot reduce poverty or improve the well-being of all.

Peace, food, and health are fundamental to life. And it is key to strengthening our global efforts to find lasting solutions to today's challenges. Let us bring "together" back to the centre and learn from the crises of today for a better world of tomorrow.

Intervention of Mr. Simone Cristicchi

In reading Pope Francis' Message, I identified three key words, which are very close to my heart. Urgent, necessary words, that serve to a new journey, in the confusion we are living in this historical moment.

The first word is *attention*.

In the Dhammapada, the sacred text of Buddhism, I found the phrase: "The attentive never die. The inattentive are already good as dead!". It is as if to say that attention, being vigilant, is the key to immortality. Instead, in the Italian dictionary, under the heading "attention", it says "to turn the mind to something". Thus, it means going beyond myself, escaping from the prison of my ego, and realizing that the world exists, taking care of the microcosm in which I live, and of other human beings. Not letting myself be influenced or bought by a power that invests billions every day in my distraction.

The second word I found in the Message is *humility*.

It comes from the Latin, *humus*. Humus, as farmers are well aware, is that substance that makes the earth fertile. Therefore, to be humble is to feel like a ploughed field, ready to welcome the seeds of beauty and knowledge that everyone can give me. From a child to an elderly person, from a housewife to a philosopher, if I return to being earth, I can truly learn from anyone!

I like the humility of the lark, Saint Francis' favourite bird, who feeds on the few crumbs he finds, and sings from morning till dusk with a heart full of joy. The humility of those who live in the background, of those who do not seek approval, and do not want to stand out at all costs. The "silent saints" I call them: perfect "nobodies", who take care of their tiny portion of the world, without asking for applause or medals of valour. Because it is much better to be an anonymous nobody than a successful mediocrity.

I like the humility of one who does not react to insults, because he becomes so small that he is not hit by any blow. The humility of the tree, which gives oxygen, fruit, wood, shade, without asking for anything in return. And all this I take for granted, just because he does not charge me for it. And so, to be humble means to say "thank you", even to any tree.

The third word, which contains within itself the other two, is *care*, and it is at the heart of the song I have chosen to perform today.

Nadia Maria, a cloistered nun who became my friend, heard the song in advance: “‘Take care of me’ can be interpreted as God’s prayer to man! Because God needs us to take care of him and creation, to bring his Work to completion”.

In each of us there is this fragility, this sense of separation from something. From the moment we are thrown into the world, from the moment we leave our mother's womb, we seek that sense of wholeness, which can be found in love, in the embrace of a friend or of the Divine.

In this sense, the lyrics of “Take care of me” become a kind of universal prayer of love, a request for help, a declaration of fragility, which everyone can interpret and feel as their own. We do not need shouts, but whispers.

We do not need blows, but caresses.

We do not need to appear strong at all costs, but to feel our power in fragility. Because we are not o the world to be perfect, but to be true.
