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Press Conference to present the photographic exhibition “Women’s Cry”

At 11.00 this morning a press conference was livestreamed from the Holy See Press Office to present the photographic exhibition “Women’s Cry”, to be hosted during the month of May in the left colonnade in Saint Peter’s Square in the Vatican.

The speakers were: Dr. Paolo Ruffini, prefect of the Holy See Dicastery for Communication; Dr. Maria Lia Zervino, president general of the World Union of Catholic Women’s Organizations; and Dr. Lia Giovanazzi Beltrami, film director, producer, art director, creator and curator of the photographic exhibition “Women’s Cry”.

The following are their interventions:

Intervention of Dr. Paolo Ruffini

Good morning, and thank you for being here.

The exhibition we are presenting today, with Lia Zervino and the World Union of Women’s Catholic Organizations, is itself, like its title, a cry out against indifference.

It stems from an idea and with the artistic direction of Lia and Marianna Beltrami, for the World Observatory of Women – UMOFC WUCWO, with the collaboration of the Holy See Dicastery for Communication.

Its realization was made possible by the *Handshake Agency*.

The exhibition will be first displayed in the left colonnade of Saint Peter’s Square, from today (we will inaugurate it shortly) until 29 May.

Eight photographers from various parts of the world. Twenty-six shots that tell us one message. Let us

rediscover ourselves as sisters and brothers, part of the same destiny.

Why the Dicastery for Communication? One might ask.

The answer lies in the duty of every communicator to use all languages to be heard. Photographs at times succeed in looking within us, in opening our eyes to our heart, in transforming us by revealing the secret of seeing beyond appearance.

Theirs is a soundless cry that tears through apathy. That captures suffering and makes it cry out. Which unveils beauty. And makes it be reborn.

They are eyewitnesses to a suffering and a possible redemption.

The cry of the women they portray deserves to be heard.

It asks us to look at the world through their eyes. And to look within ourselves as well. Women and men of communication, we all often wonder how it is possible not to see;

to pass heedlessly by beauty, and by sorrow, without being touched by it; by truth and lies almost without the ability to distinguish between them.

Yet it is communication that nourishes our thoughts, our gazes.

That is why we must creatively find the way to take our destiny back into our own hands. The way to repeat and make our own, and not forget these words of *Fratelli tutti*: “doubly poor are those women who endure situations of exclusion, mistreatment and violence, since they are frequently less able to defend their rights”.

The way of not removing the awareness – again the Pope’s words in *Fratelli tutti* – that “millions of people today – children, women and men of all ages – are deprived of freedom and forced to live in conditions akin to slavery... Today, as in the past, slavery is rooted in a notion of the human person that allows him or her to be treated as an object”.

There is, there would be, a different path. But it needs to be seen.

As Pope Francis wrote in his Message for the World Communications Day in 2020, we are woven of what we see, what we hear, what we tell in words and in images.

But we also run the risk of consuming and wearing away everything, words and images.

We live a paradox. We know everything, or almost. And yet we know nothing. We see everything, or almost. But we see nothing.

As Cardinal Martini wrote in his pastoral letter *Effatá*, faced with the new Babel of our time, we ask find ourselves asking: is it still possible to meet one another? To insert places and forms of authentic encounter in a confused civilization? It is possible to communicate today in the family, in society, in the Church, in interpersonal relationships? How can we be present in the world of the mass media without being swept away by rivers of words and by a sea of images? How can we educate ourselves in authentic communication in a mass civilization and with mass communications?

The images that make up the exhibition “Women’s Cry” has the strength, the power to compel us to stop, to see.

To amaze us and to impart dynamism. They are not static. They do not freeze a moment in time. They demand change, first and foremost in the observer. They set something in motion that does not stop. And which is certainly different for each visitor, for each gaze. They challenge us. They offer no answers. But they confront us with our blindness. They tear at the armour of hypocrisy that envelops us. They leave us speechless, but changed. Truly brothers and sisters all. Able to see with the heart.

“Looking”, the Pope repeats, “is not only seeing, it is more, it also involves intention, will. The compassion to suffer with, to share. This is why it is one of the verbs of love”.

This teaches us women’s cry. Knowing how to see goodness, to make it grow. Knowing how to see evil so as not to remain prisoners, to redeem it.

It has happened to me other times to quote, in this regard, a beautiful and heartbreaking passage of Italo Calvino in *Le città invisibili*, Invisible Cities. “The hell of the living is not something that will be. If there is one, it is what is already here, the hell we live in every day, that we make by being together. There are two ways to escape suffering it. The first is easy for many: accept the hell, and become such a part of it that you can no longer see it. The second is risky and demands constant vigilance and apprehension: seek and learn to recognize who and what, in the midst of hell, are not hell, then make them endure, give them space”.

This is also a task for artists and their art.

Asaf Ud Daula, one of the photographers who makes this exhibition unique: “My essential aim is to capture the moments of life and to give them meaning by making them still in time. A photograph exists independently of time and space; it is immune to passing time. As a consequence, a photograph captures the beauty that is found in a single moment and with it, captures its wonder”.

And also Silvia Tenenti, who says: “I started out from the difficulties of living from an environmental point of view, to recount actions in daily life. Therefore, the protagonists are places and women at the margins, who live in the desert depression of Ethiopia's Dancalia, on the inaccessible island of Socotra, Yemen, on the remote plateaus of Western Mongolia, on the borders of Siberia. My message is a message to pause and reflect on the condition of women, on the imbalances and disruptions that even in societies of widespread affluence, and not only in extreme ones, still make it difficult for women to assert themselves socially”.

Artists know how to break the mould, overcome stereotypes. Their creativity scrutinizes us, knows how to stir something deep inside us. Saying to us: *what do you see, what do you see now in this picture, and what don't you see in your life?*

These photos show us a path, and in the words of Pope Francis, they ask us if we are walking in hope or in resignation; they show us fragility to ask us what we are caring for; they show us religious and cultural diversity to ask God to prepare us for the encounter with others; they move us with the miracle of nascent life to tell us that life exists where there is bonding, communion, brotherhood.

Looking at these photographs – rereading the phrases of *Fratelli tutti* that accompany them – will help us to rediscover that we are frail but great. That we are different, yet the same. Apparently distant yet united by a single destiny. Brothers and sisters all.

Intervention of Dr. Maria Lia Zervino

Perhaps one could say that Jesus had a certain fondness for women, not only for his Mother, but also for the Samaritan woman, the sinner, the widow of Naim, Mary Magdalene.... So, how is it that so many women in the world today experience that the Church does not love them, does not stand by them as Jesus did?

What is certain is that this exhibition, in the open embraces of the colonnade of Saint Peter's Square, is a sign of how the Church today wants to embrace all the women of the world, believers and non-believers, and give them visibility, to transform, to improve their lives, that of their families, that of their peoples. The World Women's Observatory of the World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations (UWCWO) seeks to give visibility to women who, for many, are invisible. And in the exhibition "Women's Cry" it does so through beauty, thanks to Lia and Marianna Beltrami and eight other artists, the photographers. Beauty does not knock on the door to enter us, but its message bursts through directly when it is a work of art, as in this case.

Walking together with the Dicastery for Communication, we realized that these 26 photographs of women, from different peripheries of the planet, with their actions and resilience, show, as in a mirror, phrases from Pope Francis' *Fratelli tutti*. So, maybe "Women's Cry" can generate in each of us a transformative synergy, which has human brotherhood as its horizon.

We thank our partner *Handshake*, without whose support we would not have been able to realize this exhibition, and also all the journalists participating.

Intervention of Dr. Lia Giovanazzi Beltrami

The idea of the exhibition "Women's Cry" emerged from the context of "Emotions to Generate Change", the place-non-place where art touches the deepest emotions and leads to personal and social change. In a world marked by deep divisions, art can offer an open space, a common home where a common home where synthesis can take place, where we can come together as a united humanity in harmony.

Speaking of women, the divide becomes even deeper, which is why we have entrusted photography with the task of creating a new harmony. With the World Women's Observatory, we set out to find the right shots, met many of the women portrayed and tried to tell their story, from Amazonia to Bangladesh, from Turkey to Togo, from Greece to the Ukrainian border.

Each shot tells a drama, but carries within it a profound hope.

Eight women photographers have taken 26 photographs, where each image takes us into a world of strong and fragile women, carrying enormous burdens, but telling us of beauty.

The exhibition is the result of a long journey into the world that Marianna and I travelled to interpret the Women's Observatory and Maria Lia Zervino's gaze.

The relationship with the Dicastery for Communication, and in particular with the prefect Paolo Ruffini, was fundamental, because this is not intended to be an exhibition "only" about art, but to be at the service of communication.

My thanks to *Handshake*, here with President Petra Dizdar, is not formal: we have walked together for the past year and a half, bringing the art of photography and the profound message to the world. As you will hear, we will continue to do so together.

spirit. Now we present the photographers, some world-famous, others travellers of the spirit.

You have no doubt seen the large photo on the columns of Saint Peter's Square, Vietnamese women repairing nets. It is by the courageous Turkish photographer Nee Ari, who will be with us in next week's events.

The poster presents the cry of women in Togo, by Sebastiano Rossitto. From Bangladesh Asaf Ud Daula,

awarded by Forbes as the world's best green photographer (after being discovered for the Holy See pavilion at Milan Expo 2015). Luca Catalano Gonzaga, here in the room, a multiple world award-winner. Vassilis Ikoutas, from Rhodes, who will join us for the ribbon-cutting ceremony. Ferran Paredes Rubio, Catalan director of photography. Giuseppe Caridi, here in the room, traveller of the spirit, he has touched almost every country in the world. Caterina Borgato, explorer, always attentive to humanity and the world of unknown women, and the great photographer Silvia Tenenti. The graphics are by Mauro Radici and the video music by Alberto Beltrami, always a companion on the expedition.

Every photo you will see tells a profound story. You will see young girls dancing in the middle of a violent favela in Brazil. They are part of the show *Laudato si'*, The Space of Life on Earth. They will be here on 24 May, dancing among the photos in the show, explaining the redemption project. They will bring the Pope the blue headdress, which you will see in the photo of Maria Ausiliadora, made by the indigenous women of the Amazon in gratitude for his indispensable closeness to survival.

Because art becomes even more beautiful when it creates a social impact, when emotions generate change.
