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Audience with participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Reunion of Aid Agencies for the Oriental Churches (R.O.A.C.O.) and the Youth Conference

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the 96th Plenary Assembly of the Reunion of Aid Agencies for the Oriental Churches (R.O.A.C.O.), and the Youth Conference.

After handing out the address prepared for the occasion, the Pope addressed some words of greeting to those present.

The following is the Holy Father's address:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters,

I am pleased to meet with you as you conclude the work of your Plenary Session. I greet Archbishop Claudio Gugerotti, the Pontifical Representatives, the Superiors and Officials of the Dicastery, and through you, dear representatives of the agencies involved, all those who in the various regions make your generosity possible. Solidary generosity is often the only concrete response to the injustice and pain oppressing many in the human family. Dear friends, I thank you because you are dedicated to a proactive solidarity that helps heal wounds like a caress on the face of someone who is suffering. A caress that restores hope amidst the turmoil of conflict.

At the present time, there is a tremendous contrast between this reality and the plan of God: a plan of peace,

fraternity and concord for everyone. A plan that invites us to stop fighting each other and instead unite our efforts to fight famine and sickness. The Bible speaks of God's plan for peace (cf. *Jer* 29:11), but from the beginning, it also shows us violence between brothers: Cain and Abel and the killing of an innocent person. God casts Cain out but forbids that he be killed by anyone (cf. *Gen* 4:1-16). This is the first act of justice and mercy. How good it is, especially for us Christians, to listen to the sacred Word with an open heart and so allow ourselves to be illuminated and guided not by our own plans but by the merciful plan of God, who wants to embrace and save all men and women, all the brothers and sisters of Jesus!

During this meeting of ROACO, you have focused on the expectations coming from the young people of the Eastern Churches. This is a wise choice: listening together to the desires coming from their mouths but also carried in their hearts. Young people want to be protagonists of the common good, which should be the "compass" of social action. Dear young people present, you live in territories where the restoration of the common good is an essential condition for survival. May you be sentinels of peace for everyone, prophets who dream and proclaim a world that is different and no longer divided!

In the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente*, in regard to which, ten years after its publication, ROACO recently organized a large gathering in Cyprus, Benedict XVI encouraged young people "to cultivate a true and lasting friendship with Jesus through the power of prayer" (n. 63). For Christians this is the primary source of action: living faith in the Lord who gave his life for his brothers and sisters. If we begin from here, from that crucified and risen love, it will be easier not only to reject narrow visions but also triumphalism, and turn away from a merely convenient solidarity designed to impress or to be considered relevant. Yes, the pierced heart of God frees us from thinking of charity as a profession, a calculation of sheer philanthropy, a bureaucracy of goodness or, worse, a network of political interests. It is the cross, the ultimate participation of God in the suffering of humanity, that provides Christians, particularly to young people, the authenticity that they are searching for, the courage to bear witness, the strength to overcome individualism and indifference, which today are all the rage, and increases compassion. Com-passion: a word that is at the heart of our faith because it shows us the love of God, who participates fully in the suffering of humanity.

Dear brothers and sisters of ROACO, you are engaged in the arid land of suffering in order to make seeds of hope grow. I am thinking of your recent efforts to help heal the wounds of the earthquake in Turkey and Syria, amidst the daily sufferings of hard-pressed peoples. I hope we can truly continue to help them; so many promises have been made, but it is still difficult to use normal banking systems to send aid to the victims. Thank you for your great efforts in helping Ukraine support internally displaced persons and refugees. A few years ago, I wanted to unite my own efforts to yours on behalf of that beloved country through the initiative "The Pope for Ukraine", and later with other ongoing projects. Yet I also want to take this opportunity to urge everyone not to be lacking in concrete closeness, closeness of prayer and charity, to the war-torn Ukrainian people. In the recently concluded Plenary, alongside the usual attention given to the Holy Land and the Middle East, you focused on aid projects in Iran, Turkey and Eritrea. May the enormous human and natural wealth that God has given to those beautiful countries be put to good use and bring some peace to their inhabitants.

Dear friends, I renew my gratitude for your service. I bless each of you and your work, and I ask you, please, to continue to pray for me.
