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Address of the Holy Father at the Conference of States Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP28)

The following is the address of the Holy Father prepared for the occasion of the Conference of States Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP28), taking place from 30 November to 12 December 2023 at *Expo City*, Dubai, which was read out by Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin:

Address of the Holy Father

I have the honour to read the Address that His Holiness Pope Francis prepared for this occasion:

Mr President,

Mr Secretary-General of the United Nations,

Distinguished Heads of State and Government,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Sadly, I am unable to be present with you, as I had greatly desired. Even so, I am with you, because time is short. I am with you because now more than ever, the future of us all depends on the present that we now choose. I am with you because the destruction of the environment is an offence against God, a sin that is not only personal but also structural, one that greatly endangers all human beings, especially the most vulnerable in our midst and threatens to unleash a conflict between generations. I am with you because climate change is “a global social issue and one intimately related to the dignity of human life” (Apostolic Exhortation *Laudate Deum*, 3). I am with you to raise the question which we must answer now: Are we working for a culture of life or a culture of death? To all of you I make this heartfelt appeal: Let us choose life! Let us choose the future! May we be attentive to the cry of the earth, may we hear the plea of the poor, may we be sensitive to the hopes of the

young and the dreams of children! We have a grave responsibility: to ensure that they not be denied their future.

It has now become clear that the climate change presently taking place stems from the overheating of the planet, caused chiefly by the increase of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere due to human activity, which in recent decades has proved unsustainable for the ecosystem. The drive to produce and possess has become an obsession, resulting in an inordinate greed that has made the environment the object of unbridled exploitation. The climate, run amok, is crying out to us to halt this illusion of omnipotence. Let us once more recognize our limits, with humility and courage, as the sole path to a life of authentic fulfilment.

What stands in the way of this? The divisions that presently exist among us. Yet a world completely connected, like ours today, should not be un-connected by those who govern it, with international negotiations that “cannot make significant progress due to positions taken by countries which place their national interests above the global common good” (Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*, 169). We find ourselves facing firm and even inflexible positions calculated to protect income and business interests, at times justifying this on the basis of what was done in the past, and periodically shifting the responsibility to others. Yet the task to which we are called today is not about yesterday, but about tomorrow: a tomorrow that, whether we like it or not, will belong to everyone or else to no one.

Particularly striking in this regard are the attempts made to shift the blame onto the poor and high birth rates. These are falsities that must be firmly dispelled. It is not the fault of the poor, since the almost half of our world that is more needy is responsible for scarcely 10% of toxic emissions, while the gap between the opulent few and the masses of the poor has never been so abysmal. The poor are the real victims of what is happening: we need think only of the plight of indigenous peoples, deforestation, the tragedies of hunger, water and food insecurity, and forced migration. Births are not a problem, but a resource: they are not opposed to life, but for life, whereas certain ideological and utilitarian models now being imposed with a velvet glove on families and peoples constitute real forms of colonization. The development of many countries, already burdened by grave economic debt, should not be penalized; instead, we should consider the footprint of a few nations responsible for a deeply troubling “ecological debt” towards many others (cf. *ibid.*, 51-52). It would only be fair to find suitable means of remitting the financial debts that burden different peoples, not least in light of the ecological debt that they are owed.

Ladies and Gentlemen, allow me to speak to you, as brothers and sisters, in the name of the common home in which we live, and to ask this question: What is the way out of this? It is the one that you are pursuing in these days: the way of togetherness, *multilateralism*. Indeed, “our world has become so multipolar and at the same time so complex that a different framework for effective cooperation is required. It is not enough to think only of balances of power... It is a matter of establishing global and effective rules (*Laudate Deum*, 42). In this regard, it is disturbing that global warming has been accompanied by a general cooling of multilateralism, a growing lack of trust within the international community, and a loss of the “shared awareness of being... a *family of nations*” (SAINT JOHN PAUL II, *Address to the United Nations Organization for the Fiftieth Anniversary of its Establishment*, New York, 5 October 1995, 14). It is essential to rebuild trust, which is the foundation of multilateralism.

This is true in the case of care for creation, but also that of peace. These are the most urgent issues and they are closely linked. How much energy is humanity wasting on the numerous wars presently in course, such as those in Israel and Palestine, in Ukraine and in many parts of the world: conflicts that will not solve problems but only increase them! How many resources are being squandered on weaponry that destroys lives and devastates our common home! Once more I present this proposal: “With the money spent on weapons and other military expenditures, let us establish a global fund that can finally put an end to hunger” (Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*, 262; cf. SAINT PAUL VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, 51) and carry out works for the sustainable development of the poorer countries and for combating climate change.

It is up to this generation to heed the cry of peoples, the young and children, and to lay the foundations of a new multilateralism. Why not begin precisely from our common home? Climate change signals the need for *political change*. Let us emerge from the narrowness of self-interest and nationalism; these are approaches belonging to

the past. Let us join in embracing an alternative vision: this will help to bring about an ecological conversion, for “there are no lasting changes without cultural changes” (*Laudate Deum*, 70). In this regard, I would assure you of the commitment and support of the Catholic Church, which is deeply engaged in the work of education and of encouraging participation by all, as well as in promoting sound lifestyles, since all are responsible and the contribution of each is fundamental.

Brothers and sisters, it is essential that there be a breakthrough that is not a partial change of course, but rather a new way of making progress together. The fight against climate change began in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, and the 2015 Paris Agreement represented “a new beginning” (*ibid.*, 47). Now there is a need to set out anew. May this COP prove to be a turning point, demonstrating a clear and tangible political will that can lead to a decisive acceleration of ecological transition through means that meet *three requirements*: they must be “efficient, obligatory and readily monitored” (*ibid.*, 59). And achieved in *four sectors*: energy efficiency; renewable sources; the elimination of fossil fuels; and education in lifestyles that are less dependent on the latter.

Please, let us move forward and not turn back. It is well-known that various agreements and commitments “have been poorly implemented, due to the lack of suitable mechanisms for oversight, periodic review and penalties in cases of non-compliance” (*Laudato Si'*, 167). Now is the time no longer to postpone, but to ensure, and not merely to talk about the welfare of your children, your citizens, your countries and our world. You are responsible for crafting policies that can provide *concrete and cohesive responses*, and in this way demonstrate the nobility of your role and the dignity of the service that you carry out. In the end, the purpose of power is to serve. It is useless to cling to an authority that will one day be remembered for its inability to take action when it was urgent and necessary to do so (*cf. ibid.*, 57). History will be grateful to you. As will the societies in which you live, which are sadly divided into “fan bases”, between prophets of doom and indifferent bystanders, radical environmentalists and climate change deniers... It is useless to join the fray; in this case, as in the case of peace, it does not help to remedy the situation. The remedy is good politics: if an example of concreteness and cohesiveness comes from the top, this will benefit the base, where many people, especially the young, are already dedicated to caring for our common home.

May the year 2024 mark this breakthrough. I like to think that a good omen can be found in an event that took place in 1224. In that year, Francis of Assisi composed his “Canticle of the Creatures”. By then Francis was completely blind, and after a night of physical suffering, his spirits were elevated by a mystical experience. He then turned to praise the Most High for all those creatures that he could no longer see, but knew that they were his brothers and sisters, since they came forth from the same Father and were shared with other men and women. An inspired sense of fraternity thus led him to turn his pain into praise and his weariness into renewed commitment. Shortly thereafter, Francis added a stanza in which he praised God for those who forgive; he did this in order to settle – successfully – an unbecoming conflict between the civil authorities and the local bishop. I too, who bear the name Francis, with the heartfelt urgency of a prayer, want to leave you with this message: Let us leave behind our divisions and unite our forces! And with God’s help, let us emerge from the dark night of wars and environmental devastation in order to turn our common future into the dawn of a new and radiant day. Thank you.
