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Audience with participants in the Meeting organized by the International Catholic Legislators Network

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the 15th meeting organized by the International Catholic Legislators Network, taking place in Frascati, Rome, from 22 to 25 August 2024.

The following is the Pope's address to those present during the audience:

Address of the Holy Father

*Your Eminence, Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Friends,*

I offer a warm welcome to you, the International Catholic Legislators Network, on the occasion of your fifteenth annual meeting. I greet Cardinal Christoph Schönborn and Dr Christiaan Alting von Geusau, and I thank them for their kind words of introduction, which I have read. They were written down, because now we do not do the introductions here in order to save time. This allows me to have more Audiences.

The theme of this year's meeting, "*The World at War: Permanent Crises and Conflicts – What Does It Mean for Us?*", is most timely. The present situation of "a third world war fought piecemeal" seems "permanent" and unstoppable – indeed, there is now a third world war. This ongoing crisis seriously jeopardizes the patient efforts made by the international community, above all through multilateral diplomacy, to encourage cooperation in addressing the grave injustices and the pressing social, economic and environmental challenges facing our human family. This is the case, I am not exaggerating.

What, then, is the response that is demanded, not only of legislators but of all men and women of good will,

particularly those inspired by the Gospel vision of the unity of our human family and its vocation to build a world – to cultivate a garden (cf. *Gen* 2:15; *Is* 61:11) – marked by fraternity, justice and peace? This is the question. Allow me to propose a few points for your reflection.

First, the imperative of renouncing war as a suitable means of resolving conflicts and establishing justice. Let us not forget that “every war leaves our world worse than it was before”. This is certain, for we experience it. “War is a failure of politics and of humanity, a shameful capitulation, a stinging defeat before the forces of evil” (*Fratelli Tutti*, 261). Capitulation does not mean one country’s surrender to another; war itself is a capitulation. It is truly a defeat. Moreover, the enormous destructive capacity of contemporary weaponry has effectively rendered the traditional boundaries of warfare obsolete. In many instances, the distinction between military and civilian targets is increasingly erased. Our consciences cannot fail to be moved by the scenes of death and destruction daily before our eyes. We need to hear the cry of the poor, the “widows and orphans” of which the Bible speaks, in order to see the abyss of evil at the heart of war and to resolve by every means possible to choose peace.

Second is the need for perseverance and patience, the proverbial “virtue of the valiant”, in pursuing the path of peace, in season and out of season, through negotiation, mediation and arbitration. “Dialogue must be the soul of the international community” (*Address to Members of the Diplomatic Community*, 8 January 2024), facilitated by renewed trust in the structures of international cooperation. Despite their proven effectiveness over the years in promoting global efforts for peace and respect for international law, these structures are in constant need of reform and renewal in order to adapt to the new current circumstances. In this regard, particular attention needs to be paid to upholding international humanitarian law and providing it with ever more solid juridical foundations. This naturally entails working for an ever more just distribution of the earth’s goods, ensuring the integral development of individuals and peoples, and in this way overcoming the scandalous inequalities and injustices that fuel long-term conflicts and generate further injustices and acts of violence worldwide.

Furthermore, in your daily experience as Catholic legislators and political leaders, you know what it is to deal with conflict on a smaller, but perhaps no less intense, scale within the communities that you represent and serve. As Christians, we recognize that the roots of conflict, fragmentation and breakdown within society are ultimately to be found, as the Second Vatican Council pointed out, in a deeper conflict present in the human heart (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 10). Conflicts may sometimes be unavoidable, yet they can only be resolved fruitfully in a spirit of dialogue and sensitivity to others and their reasons, and in shared commitment to justice in the pursuit of the common good. Do not forget that that we cannot emerge from conflict by ourselves. We can only emerge together with others. No one can emerge from conflict by themselves.

Finally, dear friends, in offering you my prayerful good wishes for your deliberations, allow me to suggest that, perhaps more than anything else, our war-weary world, which seems unable to live without war, needs to revive the spirit of hope that led to the establishment of the structures of cooperation in the service of peace in the wake of the Second World War. I would to ask you, whose service to our brothers and sisters is inspired and sustained by the peace that the world cannot give (cf. *Jn* 14:27), to be witnesses of hope, particularly to the rising generation. War is not hope, war does not give hope. May your commitment to the common good, buoyed by trust in Christ’s promises, serve as an example for our young people. How important it is for them to see models of hope and idealism that counter the messages of pessimism and cynicism to which they are so often exposed! We cannot ignore these terribly cynical messages! In the end, “what it means for us” to be living in “a world at war”, with “permanent crises and conflicts”, is to find the wisdom and strength to see beyond the clouds, to read the authentic signs of the times and, with the hope born of faith, to inspire others, especially the young, to work for a better tomorrow.

With these sentiments, I assure you of my prayers for you and your families, and for all whom you serve. I bless you from my heart, and I ask you, please, to pray for me. Thank you.
