

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS
ACCREDITED TO THE HOLY SEE
FOR THE TRADITIONAL EXCHANGE OF NEW YEAR GREETINGS**

Regia Hall
Thursday, 9 January 2020

[Link](#)

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A new year is opening before us; like the cry of a newborn baby, it fills us with joy and hope. I would like that word, “hope”, which is an essential virtue for Christians, to inspire our way of approaching the times that lie ahead.

Certainly, hope has to be realistic. It demands acknowledging the many troubling issues confronting our world and the challenges lurking on the horizon. It requires that problems be called by their name and the courage be found to resolve them. It urges us to keep in mind that our human family is scarred and wounded by a succession of increasingly destructive wars that especially affect the poor and those most vulnerable. Sadly, the new year does not seem to be marked by encouraging signs, as much as by heightened tensions and acts of violence.

Precisely in light of these situations, we cannot give up hope. And hope requires courage. It means acknowledging that evil, suffering and death will not have the last word, and that even the most complex questions can and must be faced and resolved. For hope is “the virtue that inspires us and keeps us moving forward, even when obstacles seem insurmountable”.

In this spirit, dear Ambassadors, I welcome you today and offer you my good wishes for the New Year. I thank in a particular way the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, His Excellency George Poulides, the Ambassador of Cyprus, for his cordial greetings on your behalf. I am grateful to all of you for your much appreciated presence, and for your daily efforts to consolidate the relations existing between the Holy See and your various countries and international organizations for the sake of peaceful coexistence between peoples.

Peace and integral human development are in fact the principal aim of the Holy See in its involvement in the field of diplomacy. This is likewise the aim of the work carried out by the Secretariat of State and the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia, but also by the Papal Representatives, whom I thank for the dedication with which they carry out their twofold mission of representing the Pope to the local Churches and to your respective governments.

In this regard, we can think of the Agreements of a general nature signed and

ratified in the past year with the Republic of the Congo, the beloved Central African Republic, Burkina Faso and Angola, as well as the Agreement between the Holy See and the Republic of Italy on the application of the Lisbon Convention on the recognition of qualifications concerning higher education in the European region.

So too, the Apostolic Visits that, in addition to being a privileged means for the Successor of Peter to confirm his brothers and sisters in the faith, represent an occasion for promoting dialogue at the political and religious levels. In 2019, I had the opportunity to make several significant visits. I would like to review them with you and to use this as an opportunity to take a deeper look at some of the critical issues of the present time.

At the beginning of last year, during the XXXIV World Youth Day in Panama, I met young people from five continents, brimming with dreams and hopes, who came together to pray and nurture their desire to be involved in building a more humane world. It is always a joy and a great opportunity to meet young people. They are the future and the hope of our societies, but also their present.

Tragically however, as we know, not a few adults, including different members of the clergy, have been responsible for grave crimes against the dignity of young people, children and teenagers, violating their innocence and privacy. These are crimes that offend God, cause physical, psychological and spiritual damage to their victims, and damage the life of whole communities.[4] Following my meeting in the Vatican last February with representatives of the world's episcopates, the Holy See has renewed its commitment that abuses already committed be brought to light and that the protection of minors be ensured through a wide range of norms for dealing with such cases in accordance with canon law and in cooperation with civil authorities on the local and international level.

Given the gravity of the harm involved, it becomes all the more urgent for adults not to abdicate their proper educational responsibilities, but to carry out those responsibilities with greater zeal, in order to guide young people to spiritual, human and social maturity.

For this reason, I have planned a worldwide event to take place on 14 May next with the theme: *Reinventing the Global Compact on Education*. This gathering is meant to “rekindle our commitment to and with young people, renewing our passion for a more open and inclusive education, including patient listening, constructive dialogue and better mutual understanding. Never before has there been such need to unite our efforts in a broad educational alliance, to form mature individuals capable of overcoming division and antagonism, and to restore the fabric of relationships for the sake of a more fraternal humanity”.

All change, like the epochal change we are now experiencing, calls for a process of education and the creation of *an educational village* capable of forming a network of open and human relationships. That *village* should put the human person at the centre, investing creatively and responsibly in long-term projects that train individuals willing to offer themselves in service to the community.

What is needed, then, is an educational vision that can encompass a broad range of life experiences and learning processes, in order to enable young people,

individually and collectively, to develop their personalities. Education is not limited to school and university classrooms; it is principally ensured by strengthening and reinforcing the primary right of the family to educate, and the right of Churches and social communities to support and assist families in raising their children.

Education requires entering into sincere and genuine dialogue with young people. They are the ones who above all make us aware of the urgent need for that intergenerational solidarity which has sadly been lacking in recent years. There is, in fact, a tendency, in many parts of the world, to be self-absorbed, to defend acquired rights and privileges, and to view the world within a narrow horizon that treats the elderly with indifference and no longer welcomes the newborn. The general ageing of the world population, especially in the West, is a sad and emblematic example of this.

While not forgetting that young people look to the words and example of adults, we should also be well aware that they themselves have much to offer, thanks to their enthusiasm and commitment. To say nothing of their thirst for truth, which constantly reminds us of the fact that hope is not utopian and that peace is always a good that can be attained.

We have seen this in the way many young people have become active in calling the attention of political leaders to the issue of climate change. Care for our common home ought to be a concern of everyone and not the object of ideological conflict between different views of reality or, much less, between generations. In the words of Pope Benedict XVI, "in contact with nature, individuals rediscover their proper dimension; they recognize that they are creatures but at the same time unique, 'capable of God' since they are inwardly open to the Infinite". The protection of the home given to us by the Creator cannot be neglected or reduced to an elitist concern. Young people are telling us that this cannot be the case, for at every level we are being urgently challenged to protect our common home and to "bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development". They remind us of the urgent need for an *ecological conversion*, which "must be understood in an integral way, as a transformation of how we relate to our sisters and brothers, to other living beings, to creation in all its rich variety and to the Creator who is the origin and source of all life".

Sadly, the urgency of this ecological conversion seems not to have been grasped by international politics, where the response to the problems raised by global issues such as climate change remains very weak and a source of grave concern. The *XXV Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP25)*, held in Madrid last December, raises serious concern about the will of the international community to confront with wisdom and effectiveness the phenomenon of global warming, which demands a collective response capable of placing the common good over particular interests.

These considerations bring our attention back to Latin America, and in particular to the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Amazon Region, held in the Vatican last October. The Synod was an essentially ecclesial event, prompted

by the desire to listen to the hopes and challenges of the Church in Amazonia and to open new paths for the proclamation of the Gospel to the People of God, especially to the indigenous peoples. Nonetheless, the synodal assembly could not help but discuss other issues as well, beginning with integral ecology. Those issues impact the life of that region, so vast and important for the entire world, inasmuch as "the Amazon rainforest is a 'biological heart' for the increasingly threatened earth".

In addition to the situation in the Amazon region, another cause for concern is the proliferation of political crises in a growing number of countries of the American continent, accompanied by tensions and unaccustomed forms of violence that sharpen social conflicts and have grave socioeconomic and humanitarian consequences. Greater polarization does not help to resolve the real and pressing problems of citizens, especially those who are poorest and most vulnerable, nor can violence, which for no reason can be employed as a means of dealing with political and social issues. Here, in this setting, I would like to mention Venezuela in particular, so that efforts to seek solutions will continue.

Generally speaking, the conflicts of the American region, despite their different roots, are linked by profound forms of inequality, injustice and endemic corruption, as well as by various kinds of poverty that offend the dignity of persons. Consequently, there is a need for political leaders to work diligently to reestablish a culture of dialogue for the sake of the common good, to reinforce democratic institutions and promote respect for the rule of law, as a means of countering anti-democratic, populist and extremist tendencies.

In my second journey of 2019, I went to the United Arab Emirates, the first visit of a Successor of Peter to the Arabian Peninsula. At Abu Dhabi, I joined the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahmad Al-Tayyeb in signing the Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together. This is an important text, aimed at fostering mutual understanding between Christians and Muslims, and peaceful coexistence in increasingly multiethnic and multicultural societies. In forcefully condemning the use of "the name of God to justify acts of murder, exile, terrorism and oppression", the Document recalls the importance of the *concept of citizenship*, "based on the equality of rights and duties, under which all enjoy justice". This requires respect for religious freedom and the resolve to reject the discriminatory use of the term "minorities", which engenders feelings of isolation and inferiority, and paves the way for hostility and discord, discriminating between citizens on the basis of their religious affiliation. To this end, it is particularly important to train future generations in interreligious dialogue, the main road to greater knowledge, understanding and reciprocal support between the members of different religions.

Peace and hope were also at the heart of my visit to Morocco where, with His Majesty King Muhammed VI, I signed a joint appeal on Jerusalem, in recognition of "the unique and sacred character of Jerusalem/Al-Quds Acharif, and with deep concern for its spiritual significance and its special vocation as a city of peace". And from Jerusalem, a city dear to the faithful of the three monotheistic religions, one called to be a symbolic place of encounter and of peaceful

coexistence where mutual respect and dialogue are cultivated, I cannot fail to turn to the entire Holy Land and to reiterate the urgent need for the whole international community to reconfirm, with courage and sincerity, and in respect for international law, its commitment to support the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

A more steadfast and effective engagement on the part of the international community is most urgent in other parts of the Mediterranean area and in the Middle East. I think especially of the pall of silence that risks falling over the war that has devastated Syria over the course of the last decade. It is imperative to devise suitable and far-sighted solutions capable of enabling the beloved Syrian people, exhausted by war, to regain peace and to begin the reconstruction of the country. The Holy See favourably regards every initiative aimed at laying the groundwork for the resolution of the conflict, and once more expresses its gratitude to Jordan and Lebanon for having welcomed and taken responsibility, not without significant sacrifice, for millions of Syrian refugees. Sadly, in addition to the difficulties caused by this welcome, other factors of economic and political uncertainty, in Lebanon and in other states, are provoking tensions among the population, further endangering the fragile stability of the Middle East.

Particularly troubling are the signals coming from the entire region following the heightening of tensions between Iran and the United States, which risk above all compromising the gradual process of rebuilding in Iraq, as well as setting the groundwork for a vaster conflict that all of us would want to avert. I therefore renew my appeal that all the interested parties avoid an escalation of the conflict and “keep alive the flame of dialogue and self-restraint”, in full respect of international law.

My thoughts turn also to Yemen, which is experiencing one of the most serious humanitarian crises of recent history amid general indifference on the part of the international community, and to Libya, which for many years has experienced a situation of conflict aggravated by incursions of extremist groups and by a further intensification of violence in recent days. That situation provides fertile terrain for the scourge of exploitation and human trafficking, carried out by unscrupulous persons who exploit the poverty and suffering of those fleeing situations of conflict or of extreme poverty. Among the latter, many fall prey to genuinely criminal organizations that imprison them in inhumane and degrading conditions and subject them to torture, sexual violence and forms of extortion.

More generally, it should be noted that many thousands of persons in our world present legitimate requests for asylum, and have verifiable humanitarian needs and a need for protection that are not adequately identified. Many are risking their lives in perilous journeys by land and above all by sea. It is painful to acknowledge that the Mediterranean Sea continues to be a vast cemetery. Consequently, it is increasingly urgent that all states accept responsibility for finding lasting solutions.

For its part, the Holy See looks with great hope to the efforts being made by many countries to share the burden of resettling refugees, in particular those fleeing from humanitarian emergencies, and to provide them with a secure place

in which to live, education and possibilities for employment and reunion with their families.

Dear Ambassadors,

In my journeys during this past year, I was also able to visit three Eastern European countries, first Bulgaria and North Macedonia, and then Romania. Three countries each different from the others, yet linked by the fact that for centuries they have been bridges between East and West, and a crossroads of diverse cultures, ethnicities and civilizations. As I visited them, I experienced once again the importance of dialogue and the culture of encounter for creating peaceful societies in which each individual can freely express his or her ethnic and religious identity.

Remaining within the European context, I would like to reaffirm the importance of supporting dialogue and respect for international law as a means of resolving the "frozen conflicts" that persist on the continent, some of which have lasted for decades and demand a solution, beginning with the situations involving the western Balkans and the southern Caucasus, including Georgia. In this setting, I would also like to express the Holy See's encouragement of the negotiations for the reunification of Cyprus, which would increase regional cooperation and promote the stability of the entire Mediterranean area. I would also express my appreciation for the efforts made to resolve the conflict in eastern Ukraine and to put an end to the suffering of its people.

Dialogue – not arms – is the essential way to resolve disputes. In this regard, I would like in this setting to acknowledge the contribution made, for example, in Ukraine by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), particularly during this year that marks the forty-fifth anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act. That Act concluded the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), initiated in 1973 to foster détente and cooperation between the countries of Western and Eastern Europe, at a time when the continent was still divided by the Iron Curtain. The Final Act was an important stage in a process begun in the aftermath of the Second World War, one that viewed consensus and dialogue as key instruments for the resolution of conflicts.

The foundations of the process of European integration were laid in Western Europe in 1949 with the creation of the Council of Europe and the subsequent adoption of the European Convention on Human Rights, which saw in the 9 May 1950 Declaration of then Minister of Foreign Affairs of France, Robert Schuman, an essential pillar. Schuman stated that "peace cannot be ensured except by making creative efforts proportionate to the dangers that menace it". The founders of modern Europe realized that only through a gradual process of sharing ideals and resources would the continent be able to recover from the devastation of war and the new divisions that arose after it.

The Holy See followed the European project with great interest from its earliest years; this year marks the fiftieth anniversary of its presence as an Observer to the Council of Europe and the establishment of diplomatic relations with the then European Communities. It has sought to emphasize the ideal of an inclusive process of growth inspired by a spirit of participation and solidarity, capable of

making Europe a model of welcome and social equality guided by shared underlying values. The European project continues to be a fundamental guarantee of development for those who have long shared in it, and an opportunity for peace in the aftermath of turbulent conflicts and injuries for those countries that aspire to take part in it.

Consequently, Europe ought not to lose that sense of solidarity that has for centuries set it apart, even at the most difficult moments of its history. May it not lose that spirit, which finds its roots, among other things, in the Roman *pietas* and the Christian *caritas* that have shaped the spirit of the European peoples. The fire at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris showed how even what seems so solid can be fragile and easily destroyed. The damage suffered by an edifice that is not only precious to Catholics but important for all of France and the whole of humanity, has revived the question of Europe's historical and cultural values, and its deeper roots. In situations where a framework of values is lacking, it becomes easier to identify elements of division than those of cohesion. The thirtieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall has reminded us of one of the most painful symbols of the continent's more recent history and made us realize once again how easy it is to erect barriers. The Berlin Wall remains emblematic of a culture of division that alienates people from one another and opens the way to extremism and violence. We see this more and more in the hate speech widespread on the internet and in the social communications media. Rather than walls of hatred, we prefer bridges of reconciliation and solidarity; rather than what alienates, we prefer what draws people closer together. For we are aware that, as my predecessor Pope Benedict XV wrote a hundred years ago, "there can be no stable peace... without a reconciliation based on mutual charity as a means of quelling hatred and banishing enmity".

Dear Ambassadors,

I was able to see signs of peace and reconciliation during my visit to Africa, where joy is so evident in those who feel part of a people and together face the daily challenges of life in a spirit of sharing. I experienced concrete hope in the form of many encouraging events, starting with the further progress achieved in Mozambique by the 1 August 2019 signing of the Agreement on the definitive cessation of hostilities.

In Madagascar, I saw how it is possible to create security where earlier there was instability, to see hope in place of inevitability, to see signs of life in a place where many proclaimed death and destruction. Essential in this regard are families and the sense of community that can enable the growth of that basic trust which is at the root of every human relationship. In Mauritius, I observed how "the different religions, while respecting their specific identities, work hand-in-hand to contribute to social harmony and to uphold the transcendent value of life against every kind of reductionism". I am confident that the enthusiasm, which was so tangible at every moment of my journey, will continue to inspire concrete acts of acceptance and projects capable of promoting social justice and avoiding expressions of exclusion.

Broadening our gaze to other parts of the continent, it is painful to witness,

particularly in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Nigeria, continuing episodes of violence against innocent people, including many Christians persecuted and killed for their fidelity to the Gospel. I urge the international community to support the efforts made by these countries to eliminate the scourge of terrorism that is causing more and more bloodshed in whole parts of Africa, as in other parts of the world. In the light of these events, we need to implement practical strategies aimed not only at increased security, but at reducing poverty, improving healthcare systems, favouring development and humanitarian assistance, and promoting good governance and civil rights. These are the pillars of authentic social development.

Likewise, there is a need to encourage initiatives to foster fraternity among all local cultural, ethnic and religious groups, particularly in the Horn of Africa, in Cameroon and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where violence continues, especially in the eastern part of that country. Situations of conflict and humanitarian crises, aggravated by climate change, are increasing the numbers of displaced persons and affecting people already living in a state of dire poverty. Many of the countries experiencing these situations lack adequate structures for meeting the needs of the displaced.

In this regard, I would like to point out that, sadly, there does not yet exist a consistent international response to help address the phenomenon of internal displacement. This is due in large part to the lack of an internationally agreed definition, since that phenomenon takes place within national borders. The result is that internally displaced persons do not always receive the protection they deserve, and depend on the policies and response capabilities of the nations in which they find themselves.

Recently, the United Nations High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement has begun its work, which I hope will garner attention and worldwide support for displaced persons, while devising concrete plans and projects.

In this regard, I think also of Sudan, with the fervent hope that its citizens will be able to live in peace and prosperity, and cooperate in the democratic and economic growth of the country. I think also of the Central African Republic, where a global agreement was signed last February to put an end to over five years of civil war. My thoughts turn also to South Sudan, which I hope to be able to visit in the course of this year. Last April I dedicated a day-long retreat to that country, in the presence of its leaders and with the much-appreciated contribution of His Grace Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the Reverend John Chalmers, former Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland. I am confident that, with the help of the international community, all those charged with political responsibilities will pursue dialogue in order to implement the agreements reached.

My final journey in the year just ended was to eastern Asia. In Thailand, I was able to witness the harmony that characterizes the country's numerous ethnic groups with their diverse philosophies, cultures and religions. This represents a significant challenge in the current context of globalization, where differences tend to be flattened out and considered primarily in economic and financial terms, with the risk of erasing the distinctive features of various peoples.

Lastly, in Japan I tangibly experienced the pain and horror that we human beings are capable of inflicting on one another. In hearing the testimonies of some *Hibakusha*, the survivors of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it became clear to me that true peace cannot be built on the threat of a possible total annihilation of humanity by nuclear weapons. The *Hibakusha* “keep alive the flame of collective conscience, bearing witness to succeeding generations to the horror of what happened in August 1945 and the unspeakable sufferings that have continued to the present time. Their testimony awakens and preserves the memory of the victims, so that the conscience of humanity may rise up in the face of every desire for dominance and destruction”, especially that fostered by the possession of such potentially destructive devices as nuclear weapons. These weapons do not only foster a climate of fear, suspicion and hostility; they also destroy hope. Their use is immoral, “a crime not only against the dignity of human beings but against any possible future for our common home”.

A world “without nuclear weapons is possible and necessary”. The time has come for political leaders to realize that a safer world comes about not by the deterrent possession of powerful means of mass destruction, but rather by the patient efforts of men and women of good will who devote themselves concretely, each in his or her own field, to building a world of peace, solidarity and mutual respect.

2020 offers an important opportunity in this regard, since the Tenth Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons will be held in New York this coming 27 April to 22 May. It is my lively hope that the international community will then manage to achieve a conclusive and proactive consensus on ways to implement this international legal instrument, which has shown itself to be all the more important in times like our own.

As I conclude this review of the places that I visited in the past year, my thoughts turn in a particular way to one country that I have not visited, Australia, hard hit in recent months by persistent fires that have affected other areas of Oceania as well. I would like to assure the Australian people, especially the victims and all those in the areas devastated by the fires, of my closeness and my prayers.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This year, the international community celebrates the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations. Following the tragedies experienced in the wake of two world wars, on 26 April 1945 forty-six countries signed the *Charter of the United Nations* and established a new form of multilateral cooperation. The four goals of the Organization, set forth in Article 1 of the Charter, remain valid today. We may say that the efforts of the United Nations in these past seventy-five years have been largely successful, particularly by preventing another world war. The foundational principles of the Organization – the desire for peace, the pursuit of justice, respect for the dignity of the human person, humanitarian cooperation and assistance – express the just aspirations of the human spirit and constitute ideals that should be at the basis of international

relations.

In this anniversary year, we wish to reaffirm the resolve of the entire human family to work for the common good as a criterion for moral action and a goal inspiring each country to cooperate in guaranteeing the existence and peaceful security of all others, in a spirit of equal dignity and effective solidarity, and within a legal system based on justice and the pursuit of just compromises.

This will be the more effective to the extent that efforts are made to overcome the transversal approach employed in the language and acts of international bodies, which seeks to link fundamental rights to contingent situations. Such an approach forgets that these rights are intrinsically grounded in human nature itself. Whenever the lexicon of international organizations loses a clear objective anchoring, one risks fostering estrangement rather than rapprochement between the members of the international community, with the consequent crisis of the multilateral system, which is now sadly evident to all. In this context, there is a clear need to move once again towards an overall reform of the multilateral system, beginning with the UN system, which would make it more effective, taking into due account the present geopolitical context.

Dear Ambassadors,

As I come to the end of these reflections, I would like to mention two other anniversaries occurring this year, which might seem to have little to do with today's meeting. The first is the five-hundredth anniversary of the death of Raphael [Raffaello Sanzio], the great artist from Urbino, who died in Rome on 6 April 1520. Raphael left us a vast legacy of inestimable beauty. Just as an artist's genius can blend raw materials and different colours and sounds to create a unique work of art, so diplomacy is called upon to harmonize the distinctive features of the various peoples and states in order to build a world of justice and peace. This is in fact the beautiful masterpiece that all of us want to be able to admire.

Raphael was an important figure of the Renaissance, an age that enriched all humanity. It was an age that had its own problems, and yet was filled with confidence and hope. In recalling this outstanding artist, I would like to offer my cordial greeting to the people of Italy, with the prayerful hope that they will rediscover that spirit of openness to the future that exemplified the Renaissance and made this peninsula so beautiful and rich in art, history and culture.

One of Raphael's favourite subjects was the Virgin Mary. To her he dedicated many a canvas that can be admired today in museums throughout the world. For the Catholic Church, this year marks the seventieth anniversary of the proclamation of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Looking to Mary, I would like to say a special word to all women, twenty-five years after the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995. It is my hope that the invaluable role of women in society may be increasingly acknowledged worldwide and that all forms of injustice, discrimination and violence against women come to an end. "Every form of violence inflicted upon a woman is a blasphemy against God". Acts of violence and exploitation directed at women are not merely wrong; they are crimes that destroy the harmony, the

poetry and beauty that God wished to bestow on the world.

The Assumption of Mary also invites us to look ahead to the completion of our earthly journey, to that day when justice and peace will be fully reestablished. May we feel encouraged, then, to work diligently, through the diplomacy that is our own imperfect yet always valuable human contribution, to hasten the fulfilment of this longing for peace, in the knowledge that the goal can be attained. Reaffirming this commitment, I renew to all of you, dear Ambassadors and distinguished guests, and to your countries, my cordial best wishes for a new year rich in hope and every blessing.

Thank you!