



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO MYANMAR AND BANGLADESH

(26 NOVEMBER - 2 DECEMBER 2017)

ECUMENICAL AND INTERRELIGIOUS MEETING FOR PEACE

Garden of the Archbishop's Residence (Dhaka)

Friday, 1 December 2017

[Multimedia]

Address of the Holy Father

Remarks of the Holy Father to the Group of Rohingya Refugees

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER

Distinguished Guests,

Dear Friends,

Our meeting, which brings together representatives of the various religious communities present in this country, represents a highly significant moment in my Visit to Bangladesh. For we have gathered to deepen our friendship and to express our shared desire for the gift of genuine and lasting peace.

My thanks go to Cardinal D'Rozario for his kind words of welcome, and to those who have greeted

me warmly on behalf of the Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and Christian communities, and in the name of civil society. I am grateful to the Anglican bishop of Dhaka for his presence, to the various Christian communities, and to all those whose have helped to make this gathering possible.

The words we have heard, but also the songs and dances that have enlivened our assembly, have spoken to us eloquently of the yearning for harmony, fraternity and peace embodied in the teachings of the world's religions. May our meeting this afternoon be a clear sign of the efforts of the leaders and followers of the religions present in this country to live together in mutual respect and good will. In Bangladesh, where the right to religious freedom is a founding principle, this commitment stands as a subtle yet firm rebuke to those who would seek to foment division, hatred and violence in the name of religion.

It is a particularly gratifying sign of our times that believers and all people of good will feel increasingly called to cooperate in shaping a culture of encounter, dialogue and cooperation in the service of our human family. This entails more than mere tolerance. It challenges us to reach out to others in mutual trust and understanding, and so to build a unity that sees diversity not as a threat, but as a potential source of enrichment and growth. It challenges us to cultivate an *openness of heart* that views others as an avenue, not a barrier.

Allow me to explore with you briefly some essential features of this “openness of heart” that is the condition for a culture of encounter.

First, it is *a door*. It is not an abstract theory but a lived experience. It enables us to embark on a dialogue of life, not a mere exchange of ideas. It calls for good will and acceptance, yet it is not to be confused with indifference or reticence in expressing our most deeply held convictions. To engage fruitfully with another means sharing our distinct religious and cultural identity, but always with humility, honesty and respect.

Openness of heart is also like a *ladder* that reaches up to the Absolute. By recalling this transcendent dimension of our activity, we realize the need for our hearts to be purified, so that we can see all things in their truest perspective. As with each step our vision becomes clearer, we receive the strength to persevere in the effort to understand and value others and their point of view. In this way, we will find the wisdom and strength needed to extend the hand of friendship to all.

Openness of heart is likewise *a path* that leads to the pursuit of goodness, justice and solidarity. It leads to seeking the good of our neighbours. In his letter to the Christians in Rome, Saint Paul urged his hearers: “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (*Rom 12:21*). This is a sentiment that all of us can echo. Religious concern for the welfare of our neighbour, streaming from an open heart, flows outward like a vast river, to quench the dry and parched wastelands of hatred, corruption, poverty and violence that so damage human lives, tear families

apart, and disfigure the gift of creation.

Bangladesh's different religious communities have embraced this path in a particular way by their commitment to the care of the earth, our common home, and by their response to the natural disasters that have beset the nation in recent years. I think too of the common outpouring of grief, prayer and solidarity that accompanied the tragic collapse of Rana Plaza, which remains fresh in the minds of all. In these various ways, we see how the path of goodness leads to cooperation in the service of others.

A spirit of openness, acceptance and cooperation between believers does not simply contribute to a culture of harmony and peace; it is its beating heart. How much our world needs this heart to beat strongly, to counter the virus of political corruption, destructive religious ideologies, and the temptation to turn a blind eye to the needs of the poor, refugees, persecuted minorities, and those who are most vulnerable. How much, too, is such openness needed in order to reach out to the many people in our world, especially the young, who at times feel alone and bewildered as they search for meaning in life!

Dear friends, I thank you for your efforts to promote the culture of encounter, and I pray that, by demonstrating the common commitment of believers to discerning the good and putting it into practice, they will help all believers to grow in wisdom and holiness, and to cooperate in building an ever more humane, united and peaceful world.

I open my own heart to all of you, and I thank you once more for your welcome. Let us remember one another in our prayers.

Remarks of the Holy Father to the Group of Rohingya Refugees

Dear brothers and sisters, all of us are close to you. There is little that we can do because your tragedy is so great. But let us make room in our heart. In the name of everyone, of those who persecute you, of those who have wronged you, above all for the indifference of the world, I ask your forgiveness. Forgiveness. So many of you have told me about the Bangladesh's big heart that has welcomed you. Now I appeal to your big heart, that it can grant us the forgiveness we seek.

Dear brothers and sisters, the Judaeo-Christian creation account says that the Lord who is God created man in his image and likeness. All of us are this image. These brothers and sisters of ours, as well. They too are an image of the living God. One of your religious traditions says that God, in the beginning, took some salt and cast it in the water that was the soul of all men and

women. Each of us carries within himself a little of the divine salt. These brothers and sisters of ours carry within them the salt of God.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us only make the world see what the world's selfishness is doing with the image of God. Let us continue to do good for them, to help them. Let us continue to work actively for the recognition of their rights. Let us not close our hearts, or look the other way. The presence of God, today, is also called "Rohingya". May each of us respond in his or her own way.