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Message to Buddhists for Vesakh: together to foster ecological education

Vatican City, 6 May 2016 – The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue today sent to Buddhists around the world a message for the occasion of Vesakh, the feast that commemorates three significant events in the life of Gautama Buddha: birth, enlightenment and death, celebrated following the different phases of the lunar calendar in May. This year's message is entitled "Buddhists and Christians: together to foster ecological education" and is inspired by Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*, on the care of our common home.

"His Holiness notes that 'the external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast. For this reason, the ecological crisis is also a summons to profound interior conversion'. Moreover, he states that 'our efforts at education will be inadequate and ineffectual unless we strive to promote a new way of thinking about human beings, life, society and our relationship with nature'. 'Only by cultivating sound virtues will people be able to make a selfless ecological commitment'. In response, Pope Francis proposes that 'ecological education can take place in a variety of settings: at school, in families, in the media, in catechesis and elsewhere.'

Buddhists too have expressed concern about the degradation of the environment, as attested to by the documents "The Time to Act is Now: A Buddhist Declaration on Climate Change" and "Buddhist Climate Change Statement to World Leaders". "These evidence a shared understanding that at the centre of the eco-crisis is, in fact, an ego-crisis, expressed by human greed, anxiety, arrogance and ignorance. Our lifestyles and expectations, therefore, must change in order overcome the deterioration of our surroundings. 'Cultivating the insight of inter-being and compassion, we will be able to act out of love, not fear, to protect our planet' (Buddhist Climate Change Statement to World Leaders). Otherwise, 'When the Earth becomes sick, we become sick, because we are part of her' (The Time to Act is Now).

"As the crisis of climate change is contributed to by human activity, we, Christians and Buddhists, must work together to confront it with an ecological spirituality. The acceleration of global environmental problems has added to the urgency of interreligious cooperation. Education in environmental responsibility and the creation of an "ecological citizenship" require virtue-oriented ecological ethics such as respect and care for nature. There is a pressing need for the followers of all religions to transcend their boundaries and join together in building an ecologically responsible social order based on shared values. In countries where Buddhists and Christians live and work side by side, we can support the health and sustainability of the planet through joint educational

programmes aimed at raising ecological awareness and promoting joint initiatives."

The document, signed by Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, president of the Pontifical Council, and the secretary Bishop Miguel Angel Ayuso Guixot, M.C.C.J., concludes by reiterating that Buddhists and Christians can "cooperate together in liberating humanity from the suffering brought about by climate change, and contribute to the care of our common home", and by wishing to all "a peaceful and joyful feast of Vesakh".
