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Day of friendship between Copts and Catholics: concern for Christian communities in the Middle East

Vatican City, 10 May 2016 – Pope Francis has written a letter to His Holiness Tawadros II, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark, on the occasion of the Day of friendship between Catholics and Copts. In the text, he speaks about his gratitude to the Lord for the steps taken along the path of reconciliation and friendship, after centuries of silence, misunderstanding and even hostility. Now, he writes, "Catholics and Copts increasingly are encountering one another, entering into dialogue, and cooperating together in proclaiming the Gospel and serving humanity."

The Pope also expresses his deep appreciation to His Holiness Tawadros II for the generous hospitality offered during the thirteenth meeting of the Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches, held in Cairo at the invitation of the Patriarchate of the See of St. Mark, emphasising that "in this renewed spirit of friendship, the Lord helps us to see that the bond uniting us is born of the same call and mission we received from the Father on the day of our baptism."

"Though we are still journeying towards the day when we will be gathered as one at the same Eucharistic table, we are able even now to make visible the communion uniting us. Copts and Catholics can witness together important values such as the holiness and dignity of every human life, the sanctity of marriage and family life, and respect for the creation entrusted to us by God. In the face of many contemporary challenges, Copts and Catholics are called to offer a common response founded on the Gospel. As we continue our earthly pilgrimage, if we learn to bear each other's burdens and to exchange the rich patrimony of our respective traditions, then we will see more clearly that what unites us is greater than what divides us."

"Your Holiness", concludes Francis, "every day my thoughts and prayers are with the Christian communities in Egypt and the Middle East, so many of whom are experiencing great hardship and tragic situations. I am well aware of your grave concern for the situation in the Middle East, especially in Iraq and Syria, where our Christian brothers and sisters and other religious communities are facing daily trials. May God our Father grant peace and consolation to all those who suffer, and inspire the international community to respond wisely and justly to such unprecedented violence."

