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The Pope at the ROACO: beneath the tears and bloodshed of war and persecution there is the radiant face that reflects Christ's light

Vatican City, 16 June 2016 – The Reunion of Aid Agencies for the Oriental Churches (ROACO) is currently holding its assembly, attended by papal representatives in Jerusalem, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Jordan and Ukraine, which accompany the life of the Church and the peoples of these countries, expressing the closeness of the Pope and the Holy See both in meetings and in concrete gestures of charity in coordination with the entities of the Roman Curia. In the assembly, the presence of the Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara Churches in the Indian territories outside Kerala was also discussed.

This morning the Pope received the members of ROACO in audience, greeted the new Custos of the Holy Land, Fr. Francesco Patton, and thanked all the Friars Minor who for centuries have ensured the maintenance of the holy places thanks also to the Good Friday collection, instituted by Blessed Pope Paul VI. He also expressed his hope that with the generous contribution of many people and other Christian communities, the restoration of the Basilica of the Nativity and the aedicule of the Holy Sepulchre might be completed.

In the course of restoration work in Bethlehem, a seventh angel in mosaic has come to light, forming with the other six a sort of procession towards the place commemorating the mystery of the birth of the Word made flesh. "This can lead us to reflect on how the face of our ecclesial communities can also be covered by incrustations as a result of various problems and sins. Yet your work must unfailingly be guided by the certainty that, beneath material and moral incrustations, and the tears and bloodshed caused by war, violence and persecution, beneath this apparently impenetrable cover there is a radiant face like that of the angel in the mosaic. All of you, with your projects and your activities, are part of a 'restoration' that will enable the face of the Church to reflect visibly the light of Christ the Word Incarnate. He is our peace, and He is knocking at the doors of our heart in the Middle East, as He does in India and in Ukraine, a country for which I determined last April that an extraordinary collection should be taken up among the Churches of Europe."

With regard to the reflection by the ROACO assembly on the presence of the Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara Churches in the territories of India, the Holy Father expressed his hope that, following the indications set out by his predecessors, progress can be made in respect for the proper rights of each, without a spirit of division, but rather fostering communion in witness to the one Saviour, Jesus Christ. "That communion, in all those parts of the world where Latin and Oriental Catholics live side-by-side, needs the spiritual riches of East and West as a

source from which coming generations of priests, men and women religious, and pastoral workers can draw. For, as St. John Paul II observed: 'The words of the West need the words of the East, so that God's word may ever more clearly reveal its unfathomable riches. Our words will meet forever in the heavenly Jerusalem, but we ask and wish that this meeting be anticipated in the holy Church which is still on her way towards the fullness of the Kingdom'."

Francis asked the members of the ROACO to pray for him, as in a few days I will go on pilgrimage to a land of the East, Armenia, "the first nation to welcome the Gospel of Jesus".
