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Greeting of the Secretary for Relations with States at the Symposium commemorating the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the Holy See and Japan at the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome

The following is the greeting pronounced this afternoon by Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher, Secretary for Relations with States, at the Symposium commemorating the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the Holy See and Japan organised by the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome:

Greeting of H.E. Msgr. Paul R. Gallagher

Your Eminences, Your Excellencies

Father Rector of the Gregorian University

Mr Ambassador of Japan & esteemed members of the Diplomatic Corps

Dear Professors of the University, dear Students, Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

I happily accepted the invitation to address this word of welcome at the beginning of today's Symposium, dedicated to the historical and religious relations between Japan and the Holy See, on the occasion of the anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations. In addition, it is a personal pleasure to return to my *Alma Mater*, where, as a student, I followed courses in theology, spirituality and canon law.

Today, it is especially significant to reflect on the bonds of friendship and collaboration between the Holy See

and Japan. For it helps us better understand that the establishment of diplomatic relations was, in fact, a formalization of the numerous cultural and religious exchanges already well underway, beginning from the second half of the 16th century.

The choice of the Gregorian University for today's event recalls the special bond between the Company of Jesus and the "Empire of the Rising Sun". We cannot forget that the first missionary to set foot on Japanese soil was the Jesuit, Saint Francis Xavier, nor that the path opened by him has never ceased to produce its fruits in knowledge, in esteem and in mutual collaboration.

In this regard, allow me to evoke here the love nurtured for Japan and its millennial culture by Father Giuseppe Pittau, Rector of Sophia University in Tokyo and later Rector of the Gregorian, who, in 1984, was inducted into the prestigious *Order of the Rising Sun* by Emperor Hirohito.

The Holy Father, Pope Francis, who is a great admirer of the perennial Japanese wisdom, as well as being a son of Saint Ignatius, has a special place in his heart for the Church in Japan and in the whole of Asia. In wishing this event every success, on His behalf, I want to renew the commitment of the Apostolic See to accompany, with particular attention, the development of the Church in Japan, a concrete sign of which was the recent visit to the country of Cardinal Fernando Filoni, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelisation of the Peoples. At the same time, the Holy See will continue to collaborate with the Japanese Authorities in building an authentic culture of peace, even in today's difficult and complex international setting.

Mr Ambassador, Fr Rector, Distinguished Authorities,

I wish firmly to underline the importance of promoting peace and disarmament, against every temptation to give way to the logic of weapons and of war. The huge toll of pain, of suffering and of death that Japan was forced to experience during the course of the Second World War, especially at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, serves as a continuous warning to humankind.

Last January, during my visit to Japan, after having visited the Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Fumio Kishida, in Tokyo, I had the honour to travel to Hiroshima and to spend a moment in prayer before the "Peace Memorial". The words that Pope Saint John Paul II spoke there during his historic visit to Japan in 1981 came to my mind. The Pontiff made this appeal: "*To Heads of State and of Government, to those who exercise political and economic power, I say: let us commit ourselves to peace and to justice; let us take a solemn decision, now, that war will never again be tolerated and seen as a means of resolving disputes; let us promise our counterparts that we will work tirelessly for disarmament and for the abolition of all nuclear weapons; let us replace violence and hatred with trust and concern.*"[1]

I wish to repeat today, in the name of the Holy See, that prophetic invitation, so that a better future, marked by the integral development of the human person and by peace, may be assured to the young and to future generations.

I renew my best wishes to you, Mr Ambassador, and to the Japanese people. Thank you.

[1] John Paul II, *Speech at the "Peace Memorial" of Hiroshima*, 25 February 1981, (Cfr. www.vatican.va).

