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Message of the Holy Father Francis for the opening of the annual Interreligious Prayer Meeting for Peace, “Bridges of Peace” (Bologna, 14-16 October 2018)

The following is the Message the Holy Father Francis sent on the occasion of the opening of the 32nd Interreligious Prayer Meeting for Peace in the *Spirit of Assisi*, organized by the Sant’Egidio Community in collaboration with the archdiocese of Bologna, taking place in the same city from 14 to 16 on the theme “Bridges of Peace”:

Message of the Holy Father

To my dear Brother
Msgr. Matteo Maria Zuppi,
Archbishop of Bologna;

Distinguished representatives of the Churches and Christian Communities and the great world religions,

I greet you on the occasion of the Meeting of Prayer for Peace, organized by the archdiocese of Bologna and by the Sant’Egidio Community. It follows in the wake of the historic meeting that took place in October of thirty-two years ago in Assisi. Since then, the scenarios of history have largely changed, often dramatically; these meetings, on the other hand, have remained, like a thread that, over the years, bears witness to the continuing need to implore together, without tiring, the gift of peace.

The title chosen for this year, “Bridges of Peace”, while evoking the singular architecture of the arcades that characterizes Bologna – a city of which I have a vivid and grateful memory of last year’s visit – is an invitation to create connections that lead to real encounters, bonds that unite, paths that help overcome conflicts and harshness. In the globalized world, where unfortunately it seems increasingly easier to create distances and hide oneself in one’s own interests, we are called to work together to bring people and peoples together.

It is urgent to formulate together *memories of communion* that heal the wounds of history, it is urgent to construct the *fabric of peaceful coexistence* for the future.

We can not resign ourselves to the demon of war, to the folly of terrorism, to the deceptive force of weapons that devour life. We can not let indifference take possession of men, making them accomplices of evil, of that terrible evil that is war, whose cruelty is paid for above all by the poorest and the weakest. We can not shirk our responsibility as believers, called, even more so in today's global village, to have the good of everyone at heart and not to be content with just being at peace. Religions, if they do not pursue ways of peace, negate themselves. They cannot but build bridges, in the name of the One Who does not tire of joining Heaven and earth. Our differences should not therefore pit us against each other: the heart of those who truly believe urges that we open up ways of communion, always and everywhere.

In Assisi, two years ago, on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the first meeting in the city of Saint Francis, we underlined our responsibility as believers to build a world in peace. And, wishing to join you all again, I would like to echo some words of that time: "We who are here together and in peace believe and hope in a fraternal world. We desire that men and women of different religions may everywhere gather and promote harmony, especially where there is conflict. Our future consists in living together. For this reason we are called to free ourselves from the heavy burdens of distrust, fundamentalism and hate. Believers should be artisans of peace in their prayers to God and in their actions for humanity! As religious leaders, we are duty bound to be strong bridges of dialogue, creative mediators of peace. We turn to those who hold the greatest responsibility in the service of peoples, to the leaders of nations, so that they may not tire of seeking and promoting ways of peace, looking beyond self-serving interests and those of the moment: may they not remain deaf to God's appeal to their consciences, to the cry of the poor for peace and to the healthy expectations of younger generations".

I would like to invite you indeed to involve young people in a bold way, so that they may grow in the school of peace and become builders and educators of peace. In these days the Catholic Church is particularly concerned about the younger generations. The world they inhabit often appears hostile to their future and violent towards those who are weak: many have not yet seen peace and many do not know what a dignified life is. As believers, we cannot but feel the urgency to heed the strong cry of peace that rises from their hearts and to build together that future that belongs to them. Therefore it is necessary to build bridges between generations, bridges on which to walk hand in hand and listening to each other.

During World Youth Day 2016, I said to the young people gathered in Krakow: "Life nowadays tells us that it is much easier to concentrate on what divides us, what keeps us apart. People try to make us believe that being closed in on ourselves is the best way to keep safe from harm. [...] Have the courage to teach us, have the courage to show us that it is easier to build bridges than walls! We need to learn this. [...] May you point the finger at us, if we choose the path of walls, the path of enmity, the path of war". The passion for peace makes us all younger where it really counts: in the heart. Today, holding each other close, men and women of different creeds and generations, you show that with God's help, building peace together is possible. It is the road to take. I thank you and wish you a good journey, for the good of all.

From the Vatican, 11 October 2018

Francis