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Video Message of the Holy Father - Reflection on the occasion of the international Conference of judges, members of the Social Rights Committees of Africa and America

The following is the text of the video message with the Holy Father Francis' reflection on the occasion of the initiation of the work of the international conference of judges, members of the Social Rights Committees of Africa and America, taking place from 30 November to 1 December 2020 on the theme "The construction of social justice. Towards the full application of fundamental rights of people in conditions of vulnerability":

Reflection of the Holy Father

Dear judges, men and women, from the African and American continents,

It is a joy for me to share with you this virtual meeting between judges who are members of the Social Rights Committees.

At such a critical time for all humanity, the fact that women and men working to dispense justice come together to think about their work and build the new social justice is, without doubt, excellent news.

I believe that in order to build, to analyse the idea of social justice, starting from a complete conceptual revision, it is fundamental to use another set of ideas and situations that constitute, in my opinion, the foundations on which it should be based.

The first is associated with the dimension of reality. The ideas on which you will certainly work should not lose sight of the disturbing situation in which a small part of humanity lives in opulence, while for an ever greater number of people their dignity is unrecognised and their most basic human rights are ignored or violated. We cannot reflect if we are detached from reality. And this is a reality that you must bear in mind.

The second refers to the ways in which justice is generated. I am thinking of collective work, an integrated work

in which all well-intentioned people challenge utopia and admit that, like goodness and love, also righteousness is a task that must be conquered every day, because imbalance is a temptation in every moment. Therefore, every day is a conquest.

But it is not a question solely of uniting to shape this new social justice. It is also necessary to do this with an attitude of commitment, following the path of the good Samaritan. And this is the third paradigm to keep in mind, acknowledging the very frequent temptation that we are used to skimming over, of ignoring situations until they affect us directly. Unconditional commitment means taking on the suffering of others, and not slipping towards a culture of indifference. It is so common to look the other way.

I cannot fail to mention the idea of history as a mainstay and fundamental part of this construction of social justice. And this is the fourth and necessary reflection for those who intend to build a new social justice for our planet, which thirsts for dignity: to add to the approach the perspective of the past, or rather a historic perspective, a historic reflection. There we find battles, triumphs and defeats. There we find the blood of those who gave their own life for a full and integrated humanity. In the past there are all the roots of experience, even the roots of that social justice that today we wish to rethink, to make it grow and become more potent.

And it is very difficult to be able to build social justice without basing it on the people. That is, history leads us to the people, to peoples. It will be a far easier task if we introduce the free, pure and simple desire to be a people, without pretending to be an enlightened élite; rather, a people, showing itself to be constant and tireless in the work of including, integrated and raising up those who fall. The people are the fifth base for building social justice. And, starting from the Gospel, what those who believe in God ask for is to be a people of God, not an élite of God. Because those who follow the path of the élite of God" end up in those well-known élitist forms of clericalisms that we see around, which work for the people but do not do anything with the people, they do not feel they are part of the people.

And finally, I suggest to you that, at the moment of rethinking the idea of social justice, you do so showing yourselves to be united and just. To fight in solidarity against the structural causes of poverty, inequality, unemployment, and the lack of land and housing. Land, lodgings and labour, the three "L"s that make us worthy [in Spanish, the three "T"s: *techo, tierra y trabajo*]. In summary, fighting against those who deny social and labour rights. Fighting against that culture that leads us to use others, to enslave others, and ends up taking their dignity away. Do not forget that solidarity, understood in its most profound sense, is a way of making history.

The just are those who render justice. The righteous, knowing that when, by resolving in law, we give the essentials to the poor, we do not give them our things, nor those of third parties, but rather we restore to them what is theirs. Very often we lose sight of this idea of giving back what belongs to them.

Let us build the new social justice, admitting that the Christian tradition has never recognised the right to private property as absolute and untouchable, and has always underlined the social function of every one of its forms.

The right to property is a secondary natural right deriving from the right we all have, born of the universal destination of created goods. There is no social justice that can be based on iniquity, which involves the concentration of wealth.

Dear judges, I wish you an excellent day of reflection. I also hope that everything that you build on social justice may be more than mere theory, but rather a new and urgent judicial practice, that may contribute to ensuring that humanity can, in a very near future, be integrated in fullness and in peace.

I wish you the best. God bless you.
