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Audience with the participants in the meeting of the International Catholic Legislators Network

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the meeting of the International Catholic Legislators Network, to whom he addressed the following words:

Address of the Holy Father

I would like to apologise for not standing while I speak, but I am still in the post-operative recovery period and I must do so seated. Please excuse me.

Honorable ladies and gentlemen!

I am pleased to meet with you again, parliamentarians from different countries, at this critical moment in history. I thank Cardinal Schönborn and Mr. Alting von Geusau for their words of greeting and introduction. And I rejoice in the presence of His Holiness Ignatius Aphrem II, Patriarch of the Syrian Orthodox Church.

Since the founding of the International Catholic Legislators Network in 2010, you have accompanied, supported and promoted the work of the Holy See as witnesses to the Gospel in the service of your countries and the international community as a whole. I am grateful for your love of the Church and your collaboration with her mission.

Our meeting today takes place at a very difficult time. The Covid-19 pandemic is raging. We have certainly made significant progress in the creation and distribution of effective vaccines, but there is still much work to be done. There have already been more than two hundred million confirmed cases and four million deaths from this terrible scourge, which has also caused great economic and social ruin.

Your role as parliamentarians is therefore more important than ever. Appointed to serve the common good, you are now called upon to collaborate, through your political action, so as to fully renew your communities and

society as a whole. Not just to defeat the virus, nor even to return to the *status quo* prior to the pandemic, no, that would be a defeat; but to address the root causes that the crisis has revealed and amplified: poverty, social inequality, widespread unemployment and lack of access to education. Brothers and sisters, we do not come out of a crisis the same: we emerge better or worse. From a crisis we do not emerge alone: we will emerge together or we will not be able to come out of it at all.

In an era of political disruption and polarisation, parliamentarians and politicians more generally are not always held in high esteem. This is nothing new to you. However, what higher calling is there than to serve the common good and to prioritise the well-being of all before personal gain? This must always be your goal, because good politics is indispensable for universal brotherhood and social peace (cf. Encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, 176).

One of the greatest challenges on this horizon in our time is markedly the stewardship of technology for the common good. The wonders of modern science and technology have increased our quality of life. "It is right to rejoice in these advances and to be excited by the immense possibilities which they continue to open up before us, for science and technology are wonderful products of a God'-given human creativity" (Encyclical *Laudato si'*, 102). However, left to their own devices and to market forces, without appropriate guidance from legislative assemblies and other public authorities guided by a sense of social responsibility, these innovations can threaten the dignity of the human being.

There is no question of holding back technological progress. However, the instruments of policy and regulation enable parliamentarians to protect human dignity when it is threatened. I am thinking, for example, of the scourge of child pornography, the exploitation of personal data, attacks on critical infrastructures such as hospitals, falsehoods spread via social networks, and so on. Careful legislation can and should guide the evolution and application of technology for the common good. I therefore warmly encourage you, brothers and sisters, to take up the task of serious and thorough moral reflection on the risks and opportunities inherent in scientific and technological progress, so that the legislation and international norms that regulate them can focus on promoting integral human development and peace, rather than on progress for its own sake.

Members of parliament naturally reflect the strengths and weaknesses of those they represent, each with specific characteristics to be placed at the service of the good of all. The commitment of citizens, in the various areas of social, civil and political participation, is essential. We are all called to promote the spirit of solidarity, starting with the needs of the weakest and most disadvantaged. However, in order to heal the world, sorely tried by the pandemic, and to build a more inclusive and sustainable future in which technology serves human needs and does not isolate us from one another, we need not only responsible citizens but also prepared leaders inspired by the principle of the common good.

Dear friends, may the Lord grant you to be a leaven for the regeneration of the mind, heart and spirit, witnesses of political love for the most vulnerable, so that by serving them you may serve Him in all you do.

I bless you, I bless your families and I bless your work. And you too, I ask you please to pray for me. Thank you.
