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Message sent on behalf of the Holy Father by Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin for the Ninth Water Forum (21-26 March, Dakar, Senegal)

The following is the message sent on behalf of the Holy Father Francis by Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin on the occasion of the Ninth World Water Forum, taking place in Dakar, Senegal, from 21 to 26 March 2022 on the theme: “Water security for peace and development”:

Message

On behalf of Pope Francis, I would like to express my warmest greetings to all the participants gathered for the Ninth World Water Forum on the theme *Water security for peace and development*. It is appropriate to underline the importance of this issue, as there are so many related current and future challenges for our humanity.

Our world is thirsty for peace, for this indivisible good that requires the effort and constant contribution of everyone and that is based on the fulfillment of the essential and vital needs of every human being.

Today, water security is threatened by various factors, including pollution, conflicts, climate change and the abuse of natural resources. Yet water is a precious asset for peace. Therefore, it cannot be considered simply as a private good, generating commercial profit and subject to market laws.

Moreover, the right to drinking water and sanitation is closely linked to the right to life, which is rooted in the inalienable dignity of the human person and constitutes a condition for the exercise of other human rights. Access to water and sanitation is in fact a “basic and universal human right, since it is essential to human survival”. Therefore, the world has “a grave social debt towards the poor who lack access to drinking water” [1], but also to all those for whom traditional sources of drinking water have been polluted to the point of being dangerous, destroyed by weapons and rendered unusable, or dried up as a result of poor forest management.

Today, more than 2 billion people are deprived of access to clean water and/or sanitation. Think of all the

practical consequences that this can have, in particular for patients in health centres, for women in labor, for prisoners, refugees and displaced persons.

I appeal to all political and economic leaders, to the various administrations, to those who are in a position to direct research, financing, education and the exploitation of natural resources and water in particular, so that they may have at heart to serve the common good with dignity, with determination, integrity and in a spirit of cooperation.[2] Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that "addressing water scarcity and improving water management, especially by communities, can help create greater social cohesion and solidarity", [3] initiating processes [4] and building relationships. Indeed, water is a gift from God and a common heritage whose universal destination must be ensured for each generation.

Moreover, it is a fact that "fresh waters, both surface and groundwater, are largely transboundary. [Therefore], peace would be gained if countries could collaborate for water in various areas of the world more than is currently the case. ... Well-proven transboundary water cooperate mechanisms are an important feature of peace and of the prevention of armed conflicts" [5] In this regard, how can we not think not only of the Senegal River, but also of the Niger, the Nile and other large rivers that cross several countries? In all these situations, water must become a symbol of welcome and blessing, a reason for meeting and collaboration that will increase mutual trust and fraternity.

Let us remember that "what we call 'nature' in its cosmic sense has its origin in 'a plan of love and truth'... The world 'is not the product of any necessity whatsoever, nor of blind fate or chance'". [6] Managing water sustainably and with effective institutions of solidarity is therefore not only a contribution to peace, but also a way of recognizing this gift of creation that has been entrusted to us so that together we can take care of it.

Pope Francis assures you of his prayer that this World Water Forum will be an opportunity to work together for the realization of the right to drinking water and sanitation for every human being, and that it will thus contribute to making water a true symbol of sharing, of constructive and responsible dialogue in favor of a lasting peace, because it is built on trust[7].

Cardinal Pietro Parolin

Secretary of State of His Holiness

[1] Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*, 30.

[2] Cf. Francis, Address to participants in the *Third World Meeting of Popular Movements*, 5 November 2016; Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, *Aqua fons vitae*, 107.

[3] *Aqua fons vitae*, 26.

[4] Cf. Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 223.

[5] *Aqua fons vitae*, 27.

[6] Benedict XVI, *Message for World Day of Peace 2010*, 6.

[7] Saint John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Pacem in terris*, 113.

