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Message of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue to Buddhists on the occasion of the Feast of Vesak 2022

On the occasion of the Buddhist Feast of Vesak, which commemorates the main events in the life of the Buddha, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue has sent a message of good wishes to Buddhists throughout the world, entitled: *Buddhists and Christians: Standing Together in Hopeful Resilience*.

The following is the text of the message, signed by the president of the Pontifical Council, His Eminence Cardinal Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, M.C.C.J., and the secretary of the same Pontifical Council, the Reverend Msgr. Indunil Janakaratne Kodithuwakku Kankanamalage:

Message

Buddhists and Christians: Standing Together in Hopeful Resilience

Dear Buddhist Friends,

1. On the occasion of the festival of Vesak, the commemoration of the birth, death and enlightenment of the Buddha, we are writing to your communities worldwide to convey the warm greetings of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.

2. We write at a time when humanity faces manifold crises. For a third consecutive year, people around the world are held hostage by the lingering health crisis brought on by COVID-19. Frequent natural disasters related to the ecological crisis have exposed our fragility as citizens of a shared Earth. Conflicts continue to shed innocent blood and to provoke widespread suffering. Sadly, there are still those who use religion to justify violence. As Pope Francis observed with sorrow, "Humanity is proud of its advancement in science and thought, in many beautiful things, but it is going backward in bringing about peace. ... This should make us all feel ashamed" (*Address to the Participants in the Plenary Meeting of the Congregation for the Eastern Churches*, 18

February 2022).

3. Even though we see signs of solidarity emerging in response to the tragedies brought about by these crises, the search for lasting solutions remains arduous. The pursuit of material wealth and the abandonment of spiritual values has led to a generalized moral decline in society. As Buddhists and Christians, our religious and moral sense of responsibility should motivate us to sustain humanity in its quest for reconciliation and resilience. Religious people, sustained by their noble principles, must strive to be lamps of hope that, even though small, still illuminate the path that leads humanity to triumph over the spiritual emptiness that causes so much wrongdoing and suffering.

4. The Buddha and Jesus Christ direct their followers to transcendent values, albeit in different ways. The noble truths of the Buddha explain the origin and causes of suffering and indicate the eightfold path that leads to the cessation of suffering. "It is the fading away and cessation of that very same craving with nothing left over; giving it away, letting it go, releasing it, and not adhering to it" (*Dhammacakkappavattanasutta*, 56.11). If practised, the teaching is a cure to the ceaseless grasping that leads to greed and power-plays. The Gospel never suggests violence as the answer. The Beatitudes proclaimed by Jesus show us how to be resilient by giving priority to spiritual values in the midst of a world running amok. "Blessed are the poor, blessed are the meek, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are the peacemakers" (cf. *Matthew* 5:1-12). They are blessed, for in spite of the present difficulties, they rely on God's promise of happiness and salvation.

5. We can help humanity become resilient by unearthing the hidden treasures within our spiritual traditions. For Buddhists, the Noble Eightfold Path can develop compassion and wisdom to engage in social concerns. For Christians, hope is one of those treasures. As Pope Francis says, "hope would have us recognize that there is always a way out, that we can always redirect our steps, that we can always do something to solve our problems" (*Laudato si'* 61).

6. We are convinced that hope rescues us from discouragement. In this regard, we would like to share the wisdom of the late Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh on the importance of hope: "It can make the present moment less difficult to bear. If we believe that tomorrow will be better, we can bear a hardship today" (*Peace is Every Step*, 1991, 41-42). Let us work together for a better tomorrow!

7. Dear friends, we wish that your celebration of Vesak will keep hope alive and generate actions that welcome and respond to the adversities caused by the present crises.

Miguel Ángel Card. Ayuso Guixot, MCCJ

President

Msgr. Kodithuwakku K. Indunil J.

Secretary