



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE **BOLLETTINO**

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BIURO PRASOWE STOLICY APOSTOLSKIEJ دار الصحافة التابعة للكرسي الرسولي

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Audience with participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Reunion of Aid Agencies for the Oriental Churches

This morning, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the 95th Plenary Assembly of the Reunion of Aid Agencies for the Oriental Churches (R.O.A.C.O.).

The following is the Pope's address to those present at the audience:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear friends,

I am pleased to welcome you this morning, at the conclusion of your Plenary Session. I greet Cardinal Sandri, Cardinal Zenari, along with the other Pontifical Representatives, the Superiors and the Officials of the Dicastery, and through you, all those in all the continents who make your generosity possible.

The very intuition of ROACO corresponds to the Synodal Process that the universal Church is undertaking. The process for the presentation of an aid project, in fact, implies the involvement of various participants: those who present it, the professionals charged with offering their contribution, the Bishop or religious Superior, the Pontifical Representatives, the Dicastery for the Oriental Churches and you Agencies and all those who make up your Offices. Each has a role and is called to dialogue with others, consulting one another, studying, asking and offering suggestions and explanations, journeying together. The tools that are currently being developed by your offices will make the process more efficient, but it is important that they be in support of the encounter and dialogue that you have achieved during these years, helping to concertedly develop *the symphony of charity*.

When an orchestra plays an important piece, before it begins, it has to tune its instruments: only in this way will the performance be worthy and reveal the skill of the musicians. In preparing the symphony of charity, continue to seek agreement and flee from any temptation to isolate and close in on yourselves and in your groups, in

order to remain open to welcoming those brothers and sisters whom the Spirit has counselled to begin experiences of closeness and service to the Oriental Catholic Churches, in their home country and in the territories of the so-called diaspora. In order to find agreement, it is important to attune oneself to reciprocal listening that facilitates discernment and leads to shared, truly ecclesial decisions. This is what you did for example with the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Syria in the Conference that took place in Damascus in March, and in which many young people were actively involved.

In the desert of poverty and discouragement caused by the 12 years of war that brought beloved and martyred Syria to its knees, as a Church, you were able to discover that the springs to make the steppes blossom and give water to the thirsty, will only flow if everyone knows how to abandon a type of self-referentiality and listen to others, in order to identify the true priorities. Certainly, it is a drop in the ocean of need, but that drop of the Church is essential, while we continue to hope that the international community and local authorities will not put out the last small flame of hope of that people who is suffering so much.

The synodal style has also animated the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Middle East. September will mark the tenth anniversary of the Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente*, promulgated by my predecessor Benedict XVI during his Journey to Lebanon. Many things have happened in ten years: let us think of the sad events that involved Iraq and Syria, the turmoil in the Land of Cedars. There have also been some lights of hope such as the signing of the *Document on Human Fraternity* in Abu Dhabi. It will be necessary to verify the fruits of the Synod for the Middle East, in the field. Meanwhile, we need to find updated tools and methods that are suitable to expressing closeness to the Churches in the region. Moreover, we hope that the work of the coordination committee on Syria and Iraq, which began a few years ago, may be resumed, including Lebanon in the shared reflection.

Please continue to keep before your eyes the icon of the Good Samaritan. You have done so and I know that you will continue to do so also for the tragedy caused by the conflict in Tigray which has once again wounded Ethiopia and in part also neighbouring Eritrea, and especially for beloved and martyred Ukraine. There we have returned to the drama of Cain and Abel; a life-destroying violence has been unleashed, a Lucifer-like, diabolical violence, to which we believers are called to react with the power of prayer, with the concrete help of charity, with every Christian means so that weapons may give way to negotiations. I would like to thank you for helping to bring the caress of the Church and the Pope to Ukraine and to the countries where refugees have been welcomed. In faith, we know that the heights of human pride and idolatry will be made low, and the valleys of desolation and tears filled, but we would also like to see Isaiah's prophecy of peace soon fulfilled: that one people will no longer raise its hand against another people, that swords will become plowshares and spears scythes (cf. *Is* 2:4). Instead, everything seems to be going in the opposite direction: food decreases and the din of weapons increases. It is the strategy of Cain that today marks history.

So let us not stop praying, fasting, helping and working so that the paths of peace might be given more space in the jungle of conflicts.

I offer my heartfelt blessing, grateful for all you do. Please, do not forget to pray also for me.

Thank you.
