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Audience of the Holy Father Francis with members of the Federation of Non-Governmental Christian Organizations for the International Voluntary Service

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father received in audience the members of the Federation of Non-Governmental Christian Organizations for the International Voluntary Service (FOCSIV), on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of its founding.

After handing out the discourse prepared for the occasion, the Pope delivered an impromptu address to the participants in the meeting.

The following is the discourse the Holy Father prepared for the circumstance and handed to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

I am meeting you on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of your Federation; you represent the ninety organizations it comprises, and which work in more than eighty countries throughout the world. I warmly greet you and thank your President for his kind words.

The Federation of Non-Governmental Christian Organizations for the International Voluntary Service (FOCSIV) offers a valuable contribution to the fight against every form of poverty and marginalization, to the protection of human dignity, to the affirmation of human rights and the promotion of growth in communities and local institutions; and it seeks to carry out all this in coherence with the Gospel and the social doctrine of the Church. Thank you for what you do, and for how you do it! You are a good sign of the Mother-Church that generates hope in a world inured to the outrages of hunger and wars. Your witness is a concrete response to those who no longer believe in a possible peace. Indeed, by your commitment you demonstrate that every small daily fragment can build the great mosaic of brotherhood.

We want a world of solidarity, where everyone feels welcome and is not forced to give up their dreams. This is not just a simple wish, but a very precise intent, which one of your mottos expresses as follows: “A world to be built together, with respect for creation, in which every person is fulfilled in full dignity!” It is a very timely message at this historic moment: the shadow of a third world war looms over the destiny of entire nations, with terrible consequences for people. I am thinking, in particular, of the elderly, women, and children. What future are we building for the new generations? This is a question that should always accompany decisions at international level. Today, therefore, taking up the cry of the many voiceless to whom your organizations are close, I would like to reflect with you on three objectives that concern us all.

The first has to do with your being *volunteers in the world*. What does that mean today? It seems to be a decisive and courageous signal of openness, of availability towards one’s neighbour, be they near or far. Because the outlook beyond borders becomes a predisposition of the heart to the encounter with the “neighbour”, a witness of love for humanity. Voluntary work is based on a deep-rooted attitude of solidarity, and we all know how much poverty, injustice and violence are present in every continent. Well, FOCSIV demonstrates that we can be “*fratelli tutti*”, all brothers and sisters, embracing every human being that the Lord places on the paths of our lives. Today “we have a great opportunity to express our innate sense of fraternity, to be Good Samaritans who bear the pain of other people’s troubles rather than fomenting greater hatred and resentment” (*Fratelli tutti*, 77). In this way, Gospel teaching becomes daily life. And it is an invitation without exclusion; brothers all in humanity and in love.

A second objective regards peace, which we see is wounded, trampled on in Ukraine and in many other places on the planet. When peace is lacking, when the “reasons” of fore prevail, people suffer, families are torn apart, and the most fragile are left alone. For months we have been seeing images of destruction, of death. Peace in justice is a necessary condition for a dignified life, to build together a better future. You, volunteers of FOCSIV, are required to nurture peace in your hearts and to share it with everyone you meet in your service. It is the most important gift you can take with you, wherever you go, because “the world does not need empty words but convinced witnesses, peacemakers who are open to a dialogue that rejects exclusion or manipulation” (*Message for the 53rd World Day of Peace*, 1 January 2020).

Finally, a third objective is *development*. Every person, every people, needs the basic conditions for a dignified life; besides peace, shelter, healthcare, education, work, dialogue and mutual respect between cultures and faiths. Human promotion remains a commitment to which we must devote ourselves with willingness, vigour, creativity and the appropriate tools. Only an integral development – of the person and the context in which he or she lives – enables the fulfilment of a good life, both personal and social, serene and open to the future. But think of how many young people are forced today to leave their homeland in search of a dignified existence; of how many men, women and children face inhuman journeys and violence of every type, in search of a better future; of how many continue to die on the routes of desperation, while we discuss their destiny or turn away! Forced migrations – to flee from wars, hunger, persecution or climate changes – are one of the great evils of this age, we will only be able to tackle at its root by ensuring real development in every country. And you, volunteers of FOCSIV, are also committed to this.

Dear friends, in these fifty years you have been weavers of peace and artisans of charity and development. I encourage you to continue, on the paths of the world, taking care of your brothers and sisters, like the good Samaritan did, aware that “we cannot be indifferent to suffering; we cannot allow anyone to go through life as an outcast” (*Fratelli tutti*, 68). Do not let yourselves be discouraged by difficulties or by disappointments, but trust in the Lord, who who is both rock and tenderness. I entrust each of you and all the members of your organizations to the protection of the Virgin Mary. With all my heart, I bless you. And I ask you to please pray for me. Thank you!
