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Audience with members of the Young Missionary Service (SERMIG)

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the Young Missionary Service (*Servizio Missionario Giovani, SERMIG*).

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

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

Thank you, dear Ernest, for your greeting. And thank you all for coming. I also greet the members of SERMIG who were unable to come and who participate remotely.

Today we have the opportunity to thank the Lord together for SERMIG, which is a kind of great tree that has grown from a tiny seed. Such are the realities of the Kingdom of God. The small seed the Lord sowed in Turin at the beginning of the 1970s. A very fruitful time: just think of the pontificate of Saint John XXIII and Vatican Council II. In those years, various experiences of service and community life, starting from the Gospel, germinated in the Church. And where there has been continuity, thanks to some vocations that have received generous and faithful responses, these experiences have been structured and have grown, endeavouring to respond to the signs of the times. SERMIG - the Young Missionary Service – is one of these. It was established in Turin by a group of young people; but it would be better to say, by a group of young people along with the Lord Jesus. After all, He told His disciples clearly: “Apart from me you can do nothing” (*Jn 15:5*). From the fruits one can clearly see that at SERMIG there has not been mere activism, but space has been made for Him: for Him to be prayed to, for Him to be adored, for Him to be recognized in the little ones and the poor, for Him to be welcomed in the marginalized. Always Him, looking at Him.

There are many events in the history of SERMIG, many gestures that can be interpreted as signs, small and large, of the living Gospel. But among all of these there is one that, in this historical moment, stands out with

extraordinary force. I refer to the *transformation of the Military Arsenal of Turin* into the *Arsenal of Peace*. This is a fact that speaks for itself. It is a message, unfortunately dramatically topical. This must be repeated continually.

Here too, we must be careful not to go “off the rails”. The Arsenal of Peace – like the other achievements of SERMIG, and of all the works of Christian communities in general – is a sign of the Gospel not so much for the numbers that quantify the operation. We must not stop at this. The Arsenal of Peace is a fruit of God’s dream, we might say of the power of the Word of God. That power that we feel when we listen to Isaiah’s prophecy: “They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (2:4). Here is God’s dream, it is this: that the Holy Spirit may carry forward through his faithful people. So it has been for you too: through faith and the goodwill of Ernest, his wife and the first group of SERMIG, it became the dream of many young people. A dream that has set arms and legs into motion, that has inspired plans, actions, and has taken shape in the conversion of an arsenal of weapons into an arsenal of peace.

And what is “fabricated” in the arsenal of peace? What does it build? The weapons of peace, which are encounter, dialogue and welcome are crafted. And in what way are they crafted? Through experience: in the Arsenal, young people can learn in a concrete way how to meet, engage in dialogue and welcome. This is the way, because the world changes to the extent that we change. While the warlords force many young people to fight against their brothers and sisters, there is a need for places where fraternity can be experienced. Here is the word: *fraternity*.

Indeed, SERMIG calls itself a “fraternity of hope”. But this could also be inverted, to become “the hope of fraternity”. The dream that inspires the hearts of the friends of SERMIG is the hope, the hope in a fraternal world. It is the dream I wished to relaunch in the Church and in the world through the Encyclical *Fratelli tutti* (cf. no.8). You already share this dream, or rather, you form part of it, you contribute to incarnating it, giving it hands, eyes, legs, bringing it to life. I want to give thanks to God for this, with you, because this is a work that cannot be done without God. Because war can be waged without God, but peace can be made only with Him.

Dear friends of SERMIG, do not tire, never tire of building the Arsenal of Peace! Even if the work seems to be complete, in reality it is always under construction. You are well aware of this, and indeed in these years you have brought to life the Arsenal of Hope in São Paulo, Brazil, the Meeting Point Arsenal in Madaba, Jordan, and the Arsenal of Harmony in Pecetto Torinese. But all these realities: peace, hope, encounter, harmony, are built only with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God. It is He who creates peace, hope, meeting and harmony. And the construction works progress if those who work there let the Spirit work within them. You will ask me: and those who do not believe? Those who are not Christian? This may seem to be a problem to us, but it certainly is not for God. He, his Spirit, speaks to the heart of anyone who knows how to listen. Every man and woman of good will can work in the Arsenals of peace, hope, meeting and harmony.

However, there is a need for someone whose heart is well grounded in the Gospel. It takes a community of faith and prayer to keep the flame burning for everyone. That flame that Jesus came to bring to the earth and now burns forever (cf. *Lk 12:49*). And here we also see the meaning of a community that fully embraces the vocation and mission of fraternity and carries it forward in a stable manner.

Dear brothers and sisters, thank you very much for this meeting, and above all for your witness and your commitment. Keep going! May Our Lady keep you and accompany you. I bless you from my heart, and I ask you, please, to pray for me. Thank you.
