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Audience with a delegation of Buddhist monks from Cambodia

This morning the Holy Father Francis received in audience a delegation of Buddhist monks from Cambodia, to whom he addressed the following words of greeting:

Address of the Holy Father

Your Eminence,

Your Excellency,

Dear brothers, good morning!

I offer a warm welcome to your delegation, dear Buddhist friends, as well as to the representatives of civil society from Cambodia, and to Bishop Olivier Schmitthaeusler, Apostolic Vicar of Phnom Penh. I am grateful for this visit, which seeks to consolidate your enduring friendship as religious leaders working to enhance interreligious cooperation, an important element of society which enables people to live peacefully as brothers and sisters, reconciled among themselves and to the environment in which they live.

At a time when our human family and our planet are facing grave threats, you have chosen “Ecological Conversion” as a fitting theme for your gathering. This is a positive sign of the growing sensitivity and concern for the wellbeing of the earth, our common home, and for the important contributions that, inspired by your religious beliefs and spiritual traditions, you can offer to your noble country on its path to social healing and economic reconstruction following the socio-political crises of recent decades.

Poverty and lack of respect for the dignity of the marginalized cause much suffering and disillusionment in our times; they must be fought with comprehensive strategies that promote awareness of the fundamental fragility of our environments. There is an urgent need, through dialogue at all levels, to seek integrated solutions anchored

in respect for the fundamental interdependence of the human family and nature. For this reason, following the path traced out by my predecessors, I have continued to urge care for our common home, a care which is also a “*call to respect*: respect for creation, respect for our neighbour, respect for ourselves and for the Creator” (*Address to the Participants in the Meeting “Faith and Science: Towards COP26”*, 4 October 2021). This however cannot take place without a change of heart, vision and practices.

Ecological conversion happens when the human roots of the present environmental crisis are named; when true repentance leads to the slowing or halting of trends, ideologies and practices that are hurtful and disrespectful to the earth and when people commit to promoting models of developments that heal wounds inflicted by greed, excessive search for financial profits, lack of solidarity with neighbours and disrespect for the environment. Ecological conversion aims at turning “what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it” (*Laudato Si’*, 19). It calls us “to change gears, to change bad habits in order to be able to dream, co-create, and act together to realize just and equitable futures” (Preface to *Laudato Si’ Reader*, 13).

Dialogue unveils the profound richness that our respective religious traditions offer in sustaining efforts to cultivate ecological responsibility. In following the tenets that the Buddha left as a legacy to his disciples (*Pratimoksa*), including the practices of *metta*, which involves not harming living things (cf. *Metta Sutta* sn 1.8), and living a simple lifestyle, Buddhists can achieve a compassionate protection for all beings, including the earth, their habitat. For their part, Christians fulfill their ecological responsibility when, as trustworthy stewards, they protect Creation, the work God has entrusted to them “to till and to keep” (*Gen* 2:15; cf. *Laudato Si’*, 95; 217).

I thank you once again for your visit, which is greatly appreciated, and I trust that your stay in Rome will be both pleasant and enriching. I am also certain that your meeting with the officials of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue will provide an opportunity to explore further ways to promote ecological conversion through the initiatives undertaken by Buddhist-Christian dialogue both in Cambodia and in the whole region.

Upon you and upon all in your noble country I invoke an abundance of blessings from on high.
