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Message of the Holy Father to the participants in the Fourth International Congress of the University Platform for Research on Islam (PLURIEL)

The following is the message sent by the Holy Father Francis to the participants in the Fourth International Congress of the University Platform for Research on Islam (PLURIEL), taking place in Abu Dhabi from 4 to 7 February 2024:

Message

Dear brothers and sisters!

I send my warmest greetings to you who are taking part in this International Congress of PLURIEL, the University Platform for Research on Islam, in Abu Dhabi, on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the *Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together* that I co-signed with my friend and brother, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmad al-Tayyeb. At that event, we asked that "this Document become the object of research and reflection in all schools, universities and educational and institutes of formation, thus helping to educate new generations to bring goodness and peace to others, and to be defenders everywhere of the rights of the oppressed and of the least of our brothers and sisters". I therefore warmly congratulate the organizers of this academic meeting on the venue and theme they have chosen, "Impact and prospects of the Document", at a time when fraternity and living together are being called into question by injustices and wars which - I would remind you - are always defeats of humanity. The roots of these evils are threefold: *a lack of understanding of others, a failure to listen, and a lack of intellectual flexibility*. Three flaws in the human spirit that destroy fraternity and that need to be properly identified if we are to rediscover wisdom and peace.

Firstly, *a lack of understanding of others*. Because the problems of today and tomorrow will remain unsolvable if we do not get to know and value each other, and if we remain isolated. Getting to know the other, building mutual trust, changing the negative image we may have of this "other", who is my brother in humanity, in publications, speeches and teaching, is the way to initiate peace processes that are acceptable to all. Peace without an education based on respect and knowledge of the other has neither value nor future. If we do not

want to build a civilization of the anti-brother, where "the other who is different" is vaguely perceived as an enemy, if on the contrary we want to build that longed-for world where dialogue is assumed as the path, joint collaboration as ordinary conduct, mutual knowledge as method and criterion (cf. *Document*), then the path to follow today is that of education for dialogue and encounter. As I said in my last *Message* on the occasion of the World Day of Peace dedicated to artificial intelligence, "peace is the fruit of relationships that recognize and welcome others in their inalienable dignity" (*Message for the 57th World Day of Peace 2024*, 8 December 2023). Human intelligence, for its part, is fundamentally relational: it can only flourish if it remains curious and open to all fields of reality, and if it knows how to communicate freely the fruit of its discoveries.

To do this, it is necessary to take the time to listen, to listen to my brother who is different, whom I have not chosen, so that I can live with him on the same earth. The *lack of listening* is the second trap that undermines fraternity. On the contrary: listen before you speak. "Let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, for the anger of man does not work the righteousness of God" says Saint James (*James* 1:19-20). How many evils would be avoided if there were more listening, silence and real words all at once, in families, political or religious communities, even within universities and between peoples and cultures! Creating spaces where different opinions can be heard is not a waste of time, but a gain in humanity. Let us remember that "without encountering and relating to differences, it is hard to achieve a clear and complete understanding even of ourselves and of our native land. Other cultures are not 'enemies' from which we need to protect ourselves, but differing reflections of the inexhaustible richness of human life" (*Fratelli tutti*, no. 147). To debate, we need to learn to listen, that is to say, to be silent and slow down, in contrast to the current direction of our post-modern world, which is always hectic, full of images and noise. Debating while knowing how to listen and without giving in to emotion, without fearing "misunderstandings", which will always be present and are part of the game of encountering others, is what will enable us to reach a peaceful common vision in order to build fraternity.

But debate presupposes an education in *intellectual flexibility*. Education and research must aim to make the men and women of our peoples not rigid but flexible, alive, open to otherness, and fraternal. As I said at the International Conference for Peace organized at Al-Azhar in Cairo in 2017, "wisdom seeks the other, overcoming temptations to rigidity and closed-mindedness; it is open and in motion, at once humble and inquisitive; it is able to value the past and set it in dialogue with the present, while employing a suitable hermeneutics" (*Address to the participants in the International Peace Conference*, 28 April 2017). Dear brothers and sisters, let us ensure that our dream of fraternity in peace is not confined to words! The word "dialogue" is, in fact, extremely rich and cannot be limited to discussions around a table. "Approaching, seeking, listening, looking at, coming to know and understand one another, and to find common ground: all these things are summed up in the one word 'dialogue'" (*Fratelli tutti*, no. 198). Do not be afraid to step outside your disciplines, remain curious, cultivate flexibility, listen to the world; do not be afraid of this world, listen to your brother whom you have not chosen but whom God has put beside you to teach you to love. "For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen" (1 *Jn* 4:20).

Thank you for what you are already doing, as researchers, students, curious men and women who want to understand and change the world. I encourage you in the work you will undertake during this Congress, and I invoke God's blessing on all of you and your families.

From the Vatican, 4 February 2024

FRANCIS
