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Message of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue to Buddhists on the occasion of the Feast of Vesak 2024

On the occasion of the Buddhist Feast of Vesak, which commemorates the main events in the life of Buddha, the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue has sent a message of good wishes to Buddhists all over the world, entitled *Christians and Buddhists: Working together for Peace through Reconciliation and Resilience*.

The following is the text of the message, signed by the prefect of the Dicastery, His Eminence Cardinal Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, M.C.C.J., and the secretary of the same Dicastery, the Reverend Msgr. Indunil Janakaratne Kodithuwakku Kankanamalage:

Christians and Buddhists: Working together for Peace

through Reconciliation and Resilience

Dear Buddhist Friends,

The celebration of Vesak, this hallowed time for you that commemorates the birth, enlightenment, and passing of the Buddha, provides us with a fitting occasion to offer you our warmest greetings and reflect with you about our shared responsibility, as Christians and Buddhists, to promote peace, reconciliation, and resilience, values deeply rooted in our respective religious traditions.

“Never again war, never again war! It is peace, peace, which has to guide the destiny of the nations of all mankind!” That resounding plea, voiced by Pope Paul VI in his Address to the United Nations on 4 October 1965, has been repeated by numerous interreligious gatherings in recent years to order to condemn the destruction caused by wars around the world. We have addressed this issue on several occasions, but the continuing escalation of conflicts worldwide calls for renewed attention to the critical issue of peace and deeper reflection on our own role in overcoming the obstacles standing in the way of its growth. In addition to our

constant prayers and hopes, the current situation demands of us vigorous efforts. To do our part in bringing an end to the hatred and the desire for vengeance that lead to war, and in healing the wounds that warfare has inflicted on humanity and the earth, our common home, we need to strengthen our commitment to work for reconciliation and resilience.

Unless the deeper causes of conflicts and violence are properly addressed, the dawn of lasting peace is an illusion, for there can be no peace and reconciliation without equity and justice in political, economic and cultural life. “Forgiving and being reconciled are not about pretending that things are other than they are. It is not patting one another on the back and turning a blind eye to the wrong. True reconciliation exposes the awfulness, the abuse, the pain, the degradation, the truth” (Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, 218).

The noble teachings of our respective traditions, and the exemplary lives lived by those whom we revere, bear witness to the abundant benefits of reconciliation and resilience. When forgiveness is sought, and broken relationships healed, those who were estranged are reconciled and harmony is restored. Resilience empowers individuals and communities to recover from adversity and trauma. It fosters courage and hope for a brighter future, since it transforms both victims and the perpetrators and leads to a new life. Reconciliation and resilience unite to form a potent synergy that heals past wounds, forges strong bonds, and makes it possible to meet life’s challenges with fortitude and optimism.

As taught in the rituals and worship proper to our respective religious traditions, reconciliation and resilience are thus the remedies needed for a culture of violence that is often justified as a regrettable but necessary response to aggressive military or terrorist actions. Reconciliation and resilience empower us to forgive and seek forgiveness, to love, and to be at peace with ourselves and others, even those who have wronged us.

Buddha imparted the timeless wisdom that “hatred is never appeased by hatred in this world. It is appeased only by loving-kindness” (*Dhammapada*, v. 5), while Saint Paul, echoing Jesus’ call for boundless forgiveness (*Gospel of Matthew* 6:14), exhorts Christians to embrace the ministry of reconciliation initiated by God in Christ (*2 Corinthians* 5:11-21).

As we extend our cordial greetings on the occasion of Vesak, allow us to invoke the timeless wisdom of Venerable Maha Ghosanda, a witness to the horrors of the Cambodian genocide and the inspiration for the Dhamma Yatra Peace Pilgrimage, who urges us “to remove the landmines of hatred from our hearts” (cf. *Prayer for Peace*). Pope Francis likewise assures us that “reparation and reconciliation will give us new life and set us all free from fear” (*Fratelli Tutti*, 78). He counsels those who were fierce enemies “to learn how to cultivate a penitential memory, one that can accept the past in order not to cloud the future with their own regrets, problems and plans” (*Fratelli Tutti*, 226). All of us are called to rediscover and treasure these values found within our respective traditions, to make better known the spiritual figures who embodied them, and to walk together for the sake of peace.

With these prayerful thoughts, we wish you a fruitful celebration of Vesak!

From the Vatican, 06 May 2024.

Miguel Ángel Card. Ayuso Guixot, MCCJ

Prefect

Msgr. Indunil J. Kodithuwakku K.

Secretary
