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Message of the Holy Father Francis to participants in the International Meeting of Prayer for Peace organized by the Sant'Egidio Community (Paris, 22 to 24 September 2024)

The following is the Message sent by the Holy Father Francis to participants in the International Meeting of Prayer for Peace organized by the Sant'Egidio Community, taking place in Paris from 22 to 24 September 2024:

Message of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, I am pleased to greet all of you, representatives of the Churches and Christian Communities and of the world's great religions, as well as the civil authorities present. I thank the Community of Sant'Egidio for the passion and creativity with which it continues to keep the spirit of Assisi alive. Thirty-eight years have passed since 1986, when the first Meeting for Peace was held. Many events have impacted our world since that time: the fall of the Berlin Wall, the beginning of the Third Millennium, the spread of fundamentalist ideologies and the outbreak of conflicts with global repercussions, to say nothing of the challenges posed by climate change, the advent of emerging and converging technologies, and the pandemics that have affected humanity. Truly, we are in the midst of "epochal changes" without having, at present, a clear idea of where they will lead us.

Nevertheless, each year, as representatives of the world's great religions and men and women of good will, you have journeyed as pilgrims to different cities in Europe and throughout the world, in order to keep alive the spirit of Assisi. In doing so, you remind us of the challenge to which my predecessor, Saint John Paul II, referred in his words at the end of that memorable day. "More perhaps than ever before in history," he pointed out, "the intrinsic link between an authentic religious attitude and the great good of peace has become evident to all... Together we have filled our eyes with visions of peace: they release energies for a new language of peace, for new gestures of peace, gestures which will shatter the fatal chains of divisions inherited from history or spawned by modern ideologies. Peace awaits its builders".[1]The spirit of Assisi is a blessing for this world of ours, still torn by numerous wars and acts of violence. The "spirit" of Assisi must blow even stronger in the sails of dialogue and friendship between peoples.

This year you are meeting in Paris, and this evening you are gathered before the Cathedral that, after the tragic fire, is about to reopen its doors for prayer. How much we need to pray for peace! The risk that the many conflicts in our world, rather than ceasing, will dangerously spread, is all too real. I join my voice to your plea, and that of all the victims of war, in urging political leaders: “Stop war! Stop wars!”. We are now destroying the world! Let us stop while there is still time!

May this meeting encourage all believers to rediscover their vocation to nurture fraternity between peoples in our time. All too often in the past, religions were used to fuel conflicts and wars. The danger of this continues, even in our own day.

Allow me to reiterate once more the conviction that I expressed together with Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb: “Religions must never incite war, hateful attitudes, hostility and extremism, nor must they incite violence or the shedding of blood. These tragic realities are the consequence of a deviation from religious teachings. They result from a political manipulation of religions and from interpretations made by religious groups who, in the course of history, have taken advantage of religious sentiment in the hearts of men and women”. [2] We must keep religions from giving in to the temptation to become a means of fueling forms of nationalism, ethnocentrism and populism. Wars only escalate. Woe to those who try to drag God into taking sides in wars!

The urgent task of the religions is to foster visions of peace, as you are demonstrating these days in Paris. As men and women of different cultures and religious beliefs, you have experienced the power and beauty of universal fraternity. This is the vision our world needs today. I encourage you to persevere in your efforts to be artisans of peace. If others continue to make war, together we can work for peace. In the Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, I urged believers to “contribute significantly to building fraternity and defending justice in society. Dialogue between the followers of different religions does not take place simply for the sake of diplomacy, consideration or tolerance. In the words of the Bishops of India, ‘the goal of dialogue is to establish friendship, peace and harmony, and to share spiritual and moral values and experiences in a spirit of truth and love’”. [3]

It is against this backdrop that the title of this Paris Meeting – “Imagine Peace” – is most eloquent. We need to keep meeting, to weave bonds of fraternity and to allow ourselves to be guided by the divine inspiration present in every faith, in order to join in “imagining peace” among all peoples. We need such “occasions to speak with one another and to act together for the common good and the promotion of the poor”. [4] In a world at risk of being fragmented by conflicts and wars, the efforts made by believers are invaluable for holding out visions of peace and fostering fraternity and peace among peoples everywhere.

Distinguished representatives of the Churches and Christian Communities and of the world’s great religions, men and women of good will who are taking part in this Meeting! Today, even more than in the past, great responsibility for peace has been placed in your hands. This demands on our part wisdom, boldness, generosity and determination. God has placed also in our hands his dream for the world: fraternity between all peoples.

In my Encyclicals *Laudato Si* and *Fratelli Tutti*, I “imagined” a future for this world of ours: a single home (our planet) and a single family (that of all peoples). God has entrusted all of us with the responsibility to encourage and lead the members of our human family to live together in fraternity and peace.

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 17 September 2024

FRANCIS

[1] *Address to the Representatives of the Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities and of the World Religions assembled in Assisi*, Basilica of Saint Francis, 27 October 1986.

[2] Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together, Abu Dhabi (4 February

2019): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 4-5 February 2019, p. 6.

[3] No. 271.

[4] No. 282.
