



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF POPE FRANCIS
ON THE OCCASION OF THE FIRST FORMAL AND
PUBLIC ENCOUNTER OF DIALOGUE
BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND THE OPPOSITION IN VENEZUELA**

*To H.E. President Nicolás Maduro Moros,
to the Hon. Members of the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela,
Representatives of the Mesa de Unidad Democrática and Chancellors of UNASUR*

First of all, I would like to thank you for inviting the Holy See to participate in the dialogue and peace process for your beloved country. I would like to assure each of you of my prayer, so that the meeting and the process you are undertaking may bear the fruits of national reconciliation and peace that you desire, gifts that we invoke from God for the entire people of Venezuela.

I am conscious of the anxiety and grief that many people are suffering, and I am also greatly concerned by what is happening, and I reaffirm my affection for all Venezuelans, particularly the victims of violence and their families. I am deeply convinced that violence can never bring peace and wellbeing to a country, because it creates — always and only — violence. On the contrary, through dialogue you can rediscover your common and shared foundation, which can lead to overcoming the present moment of conflict and polarization, which wounds Venezuela so deeply, and thereby find ways to work together. Respecting and recognizing the differences that exist between the Parties will foster the common good. All of you, indeed, share a love for your country and for your people, as well as the serious anxiety caused by the economic crisis, violence and crime. You all have at heart the future of your children and the desire for peace, which characterizes the Venezuelan people. You all have in common faith in God and the will to defend human dignity.

Precisely what you have in common is what urges you to undertake the dialogue that is beginning today, which must have as its foundation an authentic culture of encounter that is aware that unity

always prevails over conflict. I encourage you therefore to look beyond the eventuality of conflict, with reciprocal readiness to become and be genuine peacemakers. At the heart of every authentic dialogue there is, first and foremost, recognition and respect for the other. There is, above all, the “heroism” of forgiveness and mercy, which frees us from resentment and hate, and which opens a truly new path. It is a long and difficult path, which requires patience and courage, but it is the only one that can lead to peace and justice. For the good of all the people and for the future of your children, I call upon you to have this courage.

With these sentiments I accompany the entire, beloved Nation of Venezuela, and from my heart I impart to each of you the Apostolic Blessing, invoking the Lord’s assistance.

From the Vatican, 10 April 2014, the second year of my Pontificate.

FRANCISCUS

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