



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE INTERNATIONAL MEETING FOR PEACE
SPONSORED BY THE COMMUNITY OF "SANT' EGIDIO"**

*Clementine Hall
Monday, 30 September 2013*

*Your Beatitudes,
Your Eminences,
Distinguished Representatives of the Churches, of Ecclesial Communities and of the great
Religions,*

I wish to extend my heartfelt gratitude to you for making this visit. It gives me great joy! You are experiencing intense days at a meeting which gathers together people of different religions with the meaningful and challenging theme: "The courage of hope".

I wish to thank Prof. Andrea Riccardi for the words and greeting which he has offered on behalf of all. Along with him, I wish to extend my thanks to the Community of Sant'Egidio for having perseveringly followed the road laid out at Blessed [John Paul II's historic meeting in Assisi](#): to keep the light of hope burning, by praying and working for peace. It took place in 1986, in a world still marked by the division of opposing blocs. It was within that context that the Pope invited religious *leaders* to pray for peace: it was no longer a question of one *against* the other, but of one *standing next to* the other. It should not and could not have remained an isolated event. You have continued on this path and have increased its momentum by involving significant personalities from all religions in the dialogue, as well as secular and humanist representatives. Precisely in recent months, we have felt that the world needs the "spirit" which animated that historic encounter. Why? Because it is greatly in need of peace. No! We cannot feel resigned in the face of the pain and suffering of entire peoples held hostage by war, misery and exploitation. We cannot remain indifferent and powerless before the plight of children, families and the elderly who have been struck by violence. We cannot allow terrorism to enslave the hearts of a few violent individuals in order to sow pain and death for many. In a special way, let us, one and all, forcefully

and continually say that there can be no justification for violence on religious grounds. There can be no religious justification for violence, in whatever way it may manifest itself. As Pope [Benedict XVI](#) emphasized two years ago during the [25th Meeting in Assisi](#), every form of religiously motivated violence must be eradicated, together we need to be vigilant so that the world does not fall prey to that violence that is contained in any project for civilization which is based on saying “no” to God.

As leaders of different religions there is much we can do. Peace is the responsibility of everyone. To pray for peace, to work for peace! A religious *leader* is always a man or woman of peace, for the commandment of peace is inscribed in the depths of the religious traditions that we represent. But what can we do? Your annual meeting suggests the way forward: the courage of dialogue. This courage, this dialogue gives us hope. It has nothing to do with optimism; it's entirely different. Hope! In the world, in society, there is little peace also because dialogue is missing, we find it difficult to go beyond the narrow horizon of our own interests in order to open ourselves to a true and sincere comparison. Peace requires a persistent, patient, strong, intelligent dialogue by which nothing is lost. Dialogue can overcome war. Dialogue can bring people of different generations who often ignore one another to live together; it makes citizens of different ethnic backgrounds and of different beliefs coexist. Dialogue is the way of peace. For dialogue fosters understanding, harmony, concord and peace. For this reason, it is vital that it grow and expand between people of every condition and belief, like a net of peace that protects the world and especially protects the weakest members.

As religious *leaders*, we are called to be true “people of dialogue”, to cooperate in building peace not as intermediaries but as authentic mediators. Intermediaries seek to give everyone a discount ultimately in order to gain something for themselves. However, the mediator is one who retains nothing for himself, but rather spends himself generously until he is consumed, knowing that the only gain is peace. Each one of us is called to be an artisan of peace, by uniting and not dividing, by extinguishing hatred and not holding on to it, by opening paths to dialogue and not by constructing new walls! Let us dialogue and meet each other in order to establish a culture of dialogue in the world, a culture of encounter.

The legacy of the first meeting in Assisi, which is nourished year after year through your journey together, shows that dialogue is intimately bound to prayer. Dialogue and prayer grow or wither together. Man's relationship with God is the school and sustenance for dialogue with men. Pope [Paul VI](#) spoke of the “transcendent origin of dialogue”; he said: “Religion of its very nature is a certain relationship between God and man. It finds its expression in prayer, and prayer is dialogue” (Encyclical [Ecclesiam Suam](#), n. 70).

Let us continue to pray for peace in the world, for peace in Syria, for peace in the Middle East, for peace in many countries of the world. May the courage of peace give the courage of hope to the world, to all those who suffer on account of war, to young people who are worried about their future. May God Almighty, who listens to our prayers, sustain us on this journey of peace. And I

would like to suggest now that each one of us, all of us, in the presence of God, in silence, that all of us, mutually wish one another peace. [Pause for silence] Thank you!