



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO MEMBERS OF THE REUNION OF AID AGENCIES
FOR THE ORIENTAL CHURCHES (R.O.A.C.O.)***

*Clementine Hall
Thursday, 26 June 2014*

Dear Friends,

A month ago, I had the grace of making a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Today this meeting with the Congregation for the Oriental Churches and with the representatives of R.O.A.C.O. allows me to reaffirm my closeness to all the Churches of the East. My pilgrimage was a great source of consolation, but also of encouragement and a renewed sense of responsibility for the advancement of full unity among Christians and of dialogue between religions.

I thank the Cardinal Prefect, who has recalled the various events of the pilgrimage. With great affection I also greet each of you and the communities to which you belong. Together let us give thanks to God and pray that the Apostolic Journey will, like a good seed, bring forth abundant fruit. It is the Lord who will make that fruit blossom and grow, if we but entrust ourselves to him in prayer and press forward, despite every difficulty, along the paths pointed out to us by the Gospel.

The olive tree which I planted in the Vatican Gardens together with the Patriarch of Constantinople and the Presidents of Israel and Palestine, is a symbol of that peace which is secure and enduring only because it is cultivated by many hands. Those who would cultivate the plant of peace must never forget that God alone gives the growth. True peace, the peace which the world cannot give, is a gift to us from Jesus Christ. For all the grievous attacks it endures today, peace can always flourish again. I thank you, always, because that you continue to “make peace grow” through charity, which is the ultimate aim of all your organizations. With unity and charity Christ’s disciples strive to be peacemakers everywhere, in all peoples and communities, and to overcome persistent forms of discrimination, starting with those based on religion.

First among those called to be peacemakers are our brothers and sisters of the Oriental Churches, together with their pastors. Hoping at times against all hope, remaining in the place of their birth where the Gospel of the incarnate Son of God was first proclaimed, may they experience the blessedness reserved to those who are peacemakers: “they will be called children of God” (*Mt* 5:9). And may they always feel the support of the universal Church and never falter in their conviction that the fire of Pentecost, the power of Love, can halt the fire of arms, hatred and vengeance. Their tears and their anguish are ours, as well as their hope! We can express this through our solidarity, if it is one which is concrete and effective, capable of ensuring that the international community upholds the rights of individuals and peoples.

In a special way, I join you in telling our brothers and sisters in Syria and Iraq, their bishops and priests, that the Catholic Church is close to them. The Church is likewise close to our brothers and sisters in the Holy Land and the Middle East, but also to the beloved people of Ukraine in the critical situation in which they find themselves, and to the people of Romania. This closeness and concern is expressed in the works which your agencies carry out. I urge you to continue your generous efforts to help them. Your works of relief and assistance in nations most affected by these crises respond to basic needs, particularly of those who are powerless and most vulnerable, as well as the many young people tempted to leave their homeland. And since communities of Eastern Christians are present worldwide, you are working everywhere to bring relief to the displaced and to refugees, restoring their dignity and their security in full respect for their identity and religious freedom.

Dear friends, I encourage you to pursue the goals set in your last Plenary Session, especially those regarding the training of young people and teachers. At the same time, as the Extraordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops dedicated to the family fast approaches, I urge you to give priority to this area, letting yourselves be guided by the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente* (Nos. 58-61). For the Holy Family of Nazareth, “which knew anxiety... as well as the pain of persecution, emigration and hard daily labour” teaches us “to trust the Father, to imitate Christ and to let ourselves be guided by the Holy Spirit” (*ibid.*, 59). May the Holy Mother of God accompany all families with her prayers, so that through them the Church, filled with the joy and strength of the Gospel, may always be a fruitful mother, anxious to strengthen the unity of the whole family of God.

Once again I thank you for your work. To all of you I cordially impart my blessing.