



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE INTERNATIONAL PEACE MEETING
ORGANIZED BY THE COMMUNITY OF SANT'EGIDIO**

"Peace is the Future"

[Antwerp, 7-9 September 2014]

*To the Most Reverend Johan Jozef Bonny
Bishop of Antwerp*

I ask you kindly to convey my warm greetings and cordial good wishes to the representatives of Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities and to the many leaders of the world religions assembled in Antwerp from 7-9 September 2014 for the International Peace Meeting. I thank the Diocese of Antwerp and the Community of Sant'Egidio for organizing this gathering in which men and women of different religious traditions come together on a pilgrimage of prayer and dialogue inspired by the "spirit of Assisi".

The theme of this year's Meeting — Peace is the Future — recalls the tragic outbreak of the First World War a hundred years ago, while evoking a future in which mutual respect, dialogue and cooperation will help to banish the grim spectre of armed conflict. In these days, when not a few peoples in our world need to be helped to find the way to peace, this anniversary can teach us that war is never a satisfactory means of redressing injustice and achieving balanced solutions to political and social discord. All war is ultimately, as Pope Benedict XV stated in 1917, a "senseless slaughter". War drags peoples into a spiral of violence which then proves difficult to control; it tears down what generations have laboured to build up and it sets the scene for even greater injustices and conflicts.

When we think of the countless conflicts and wars, declared and undeclared, which presently afflict our human family, blighting the lives of young and old alike, poisoning age-old relationships

of coexistence between different ethnic and religious groups, and forcing families and entire communities into exile, it is evident that, together with men and women of good will everywhere, we cannot remain passive in the face of so much suffering, so many "senseless slaughters".

It is here that our various religious traditions can, in "the spirit of Assisi", make a specific contribution to peace. We can do this through the power of prayer. All of us have come to realize that prayer and dialogue are profoundly interrelated and mutually enriching. It is my hope that these days of prayer and dialogue will serve as a powerful reminder that the pursuit of peace and understanding through prayer can forge lasting bonds of unity and prevail over the passions of war. War is never a necessity, nor is it inevitable. Another way can always be found: the way of dialogue, encounter and the sincere search for truth.

The time has come for religious leaders to cooperate more effectively in the work of healing wounds, resolving conflicts and pursuing peace. Peace is the sure sign of a commitment to the cause of God. Religious leaders are called to be men and women of peace. They are capable of fostering the culture of encounter and peace, when other options fail or falter. We must be peacemakers, and our communities must be schools of respect and dialogue with those of other ethnic or religious groups, places where we learn to overcome tensions, foster just and peaceful relations between peoples and social groups, and build a better future for coming generations.

With these sentiments, I invoke upon all taking part in the Meeting and all who sustain them by the support of their prayers, the abundant blessings of the God of peace (cf. Rom 15:33).

From the Vatican, 26 August 2014

FRANCIS