



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

to the KINGDOM OF BAHRAIN

on the occasion of the "Bahrain Forum for Dialogue: East and West for Human Coexistence"

(3 - 6 NOVEMBER 2022)

MEETING WITH THE AUTHORITIES, CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS

Awali

Thursday, 3 November 2022

[Multimedia]

Your Majesty, Your Royal Highnesses,
Honourable Members of the Government and the Diplomatic Corps,
Distinguished Religious and Civil Authorities,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
As-salamu alaikum!

I express my deep gratitude to His Majesty for his invitation to visit the Kingdom of Bahrain, his warm and gracious welcome and his kind words. I greet you all most cordially. I would like to address a word of friendship and affection to everyone living in this country: to each believer and individual and to the members of every family, which the Constitution of Bahrain defines as "the basis of society". To all I express my joy to be in your midst.

Here, where the waters of the sea surround the sands of the desert, and imposing skyscrapers rise beside traditional Oriental markets, very different realities come together: ancient and modern converge; tradition and progress mix; and above all, people from various backgrounds create a distinctive *mosaic of life*. In preparing for my visit, I learned about one outstanding "emblem of

vitality” in this country, which is the “Tree of Life” (*Shajarat-al-Hayat*). I would like to take it as my inspiration for sharing a few thoughts with you. The tree itself is a majestic acacia that has survived for centuries in a desert area with very little rainfall. It seems impossible that a tree of this age has been able to live and flourish in these conditions. According to many people, the secret is to be found in its roots, which extend for dozens of meters beneath the ground, drawing from subterranean deposits of water.

Roots, then. The Kingdom of Bahrain is committed to remembering and cherishing its past, which tells of an extremely ancient land, to which thousands of years ago peoples came, drawn by its beauty, due especially to the abundant springs of fresh water that gave it the reputation of being a paradise. The ancient kingdom of Dilmun was thus called “the land of the living”. As we ascend from those vast roots – which spread over more than 4,500 years of uninterrupted human presence – we see how Bahrain’s geographical position, the talents and commercial abilities of its people, together with historical events, have enabled it to take shape as a crossroads of mutual enrichment between peoples. One thing stands out in the history of this land: it has always been a place of encounter between different peoples.

This is in fact *the life-giving water* from which, today too, Bahrain’s roots continue to be nourished. The country’s greatest riches shine forth in its ethnic and cultural diversity, and in the peaceful co-existence and the traditional hospitality of its people. Diversity that is not bland, but inclusive, is the wealth of every truly developed country. On these islands, we can admire a composite, multiethnic and multi-religious society, capable of overcoming the risk of isolation. This is so important in our time, when the tendency to turn in exclusively on ourselves and on our particular interests prevents an appreciation of the essential importance of the greater whole. The numerous national, ethnic and religious groups that coexist in Bahrain testify that we can and must live together in our world, which in these decades has become a global village. Indeed, although globalization has taken root, in many ways we still lack “the spirit of a village”, as shown by hospitality, concern for others and a sense of fraternity. Instead, we are witnessing with deep concern the massive spread of indifference and mutual distrust, the burgeoning of rivalries and conflicts that we had hoped were a thing of the past, and forms of populism, extremism and imperialism that jeopardize the security of all. In spite of progress and so many forms of social and scientific achievements, the cultural disparity between various parts of the world is growing, and destructive attitudes of conflict are preferred to beneficial opportunities for fruitful encounter.

Let us think instead of the Tree of Life, your symbol, and to the parched deserts of human coexistence let us bring the water of fraternity. May we never allow opportunities for encounter between civilizations, religions and cultures to evaporate, or the roots of our humanity to become desiccated and lifeless! Let us work together! Let us work in the service of togetherness and hope! I am here, in this land of the Tree of Life, as a *sower of peace*, in order to experience these days of encounter and to take part in a Forum of dialogue between East and West for the sake of peaceful human coexistence. I thank even now my travelling companions, especially the

representatives of the religions. These days mark a precious stage in the journey of friendship that has intensified in recent years with various Islamic religious leaders, a fraternal journey that, beneath the gaze of heaven, seeks to foster peace on earth.

In this regard, I express my appreciation for the International Conferences and the possibilities for encounter that this Kingdom organizes and promotes, stressing in particular the themes of respect, tolerance and religious freedom. These are fundamental themes, recognized by the country's Constitution, which lays down that "there shall be no discrimination... on the basis of sex, origin, language, religion or creed" (Art. 18), that "freedom of conscience is absolute", and that "the state guarantees the inviolability of worship" (Art. 22). These are, above all, commitments that need constantly to be put into practice, so that religious freedom will be complete and not limited to freedom of worship; that equal dignity and equal opportunities will be concretely recognized for each group and for every individual; that no forms of discrimination exist and that fundamental human rights are not violated but promoted. I think in the first place of the right to life, of the need to guarantee that right always, including for those being punished, whose lives should not be taken.

Let us return to the Tree of Life. In the course of time, its many branches of varying size have produced abundant foliage, thus increasing the tree's height and breadth. In this country, it was the contribution made by so many individuals from different peoples that enabled a remarkable increase in productivity. This was made possible by immigration. The Kingdom of Bahrain vaunts one of the highest levels of immigration in the world: about half of the resident population are foreigners, working in an evident way for the development of a country in which, despite leaving their native countries behind, they feel at home. At the same time, we must acknowledge that in our world unemployment levels remain all too high, and much labour is in fact dehumanizing. This does not only entail a grave risk of social instability, but constitutes a threat to human dignity. For labour is not only necessary for earning a livelihood: it is a right, indispensable for integral self-development and the shaping of a truly humane society.

From this country, which is so attractive for the employment opportunities that it provides, I would like to call attention once more to the *global labour crisis*. Labour is as precious as bread; like bread, it is often lacking, and often too, it is a bread that is poisoned, since it enslaves. In both cases, what is central are no longer men and women who, rather than being the sacred and inviolable end and goal of work, are reduced instead to a mere means of producing wealth. Let us guarantee that working conditions everywhere are safe and dignified, that they foster rather than hinder people's cultural and spiritual growth; and that they serve to advance social cohesion, to the benefit of common life and the development of each country (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 9, 27, 60, 67).

Bahrain can be proud of its significant contributions in this regard: I think, for example, of the first school for women established in the Gulf and the abolition of slavery. May it be a beacon through

the region for the promotion of equal rights and improved conditions for workers, women and young people, while at the same time ensuring respect and concern for all those who feel most at the margins of society, such as immigrants and prisoners. For an authentic, humane and integral development is measured above all by the concern shown to them.

The Tree of Life, rising up from the desert landscape, also makes me think of two critical areas for everyone, but challenge above all those who, in governing, are responsible for serving the common good. First, the question of the environment. How many trees are cut down, how many ecosystems are devastated, how many seas are polluted by our insatiable human greed, which then comes back to bite us! Let us work tirelessly in confronting this dramatic emergency and enact concrete and farsighted decisions inspired by concern for coming generations, before it is too late and their future is compromised! May the *United Nations Climate Change Conference* (COP27), to take place in Egypt a few days from now, mark a step forward in this regard!

Second, the Tree of Life, whose roots that, deep in the subsoil, furnish vital water to the trunk, and from the trunk to the branches and then the leaves that give oxygen to creatures, makes me think of our human vocation, the vocation of each man and woman on earth, to make life flourish. Yet today we increasingly witness lethal actions and threats. I think especially of the monstrous and senseless reality of war, which everywhere sows destruction and crushes hope. War brings out the worst in man: selfishness, violence and dishonesty. For war, every war, brings in its wake the death of truth. Let us reject the logic of weapons and change course, diverting enormous military expenditures to investments in combating hunger and the lack of healthcare and education. I grieve deeply for all these situations of conflict. Surveying the Arab Peninsula, whose countries I greet with sincere respect, my thoughts turn in a particular and heartfelt way to Yemen, torn by a forgotten war that, like every war, issues not in victory but only in bitter defeat for everyone. I especially keep in my prayers the civilians, the children, the elderly and the sick. And I beg: Let there be an end to the clash of weapons! Let there be an end to the clash of weapons! Let there be an end to the clash of weapons! Let us be committed, everywhere and concretely, to building peace!

The *Kingdom of Bahrain Declaration* acknowledges in this regard that, “religious faith is a blessing to all mankind and the foundation for peace in the world”. I am here today as a believer, as a Christian, as a man and as a pilgrim of peace, because today, more than ever, we are called, everywhere, to commit ourselves seriously to peacemaking. Your Majesty, Your Royal Highnesses, distinguished authorities and friends, I thus make my own and share with you, as my hope and prayer for these greatly-desired days of my visit in the Kingdom of Bahrain, a fine passage of the same Declaration. It reads: “We commit to working for a world where people of sincere belief join together to reject that which divides us and concentrate instead on celebrating and expanding on that which unites us”. So may it be, with the blessing of the Most High!

Shukran! [Thank you!]
