The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE MEETING OF
AID AGENCIES FOR THE ORIENTAL CHURCHES (R.O.A.C.O.)

Clementine Hall
Thursday, 27 June 2024

[Multimedia]

Dear Friends,

In offering you a warm welcome at the conclusion of your Plenary Session, I greet Cardinal Claudio Gugerotti, the other Superiors of the Dicastery, the Officials, and the members of the Agencies taking part in your meeting.

As I look around in your presence, my thoughts turn with affection to the Eastern Churches, which must be cherished and esteemed for the unique spiritual and sapiential traditions that they preserve, and for all that they have to say to us about the Christian life, synodality, and the liturgy. We think of early Fathers, the Councils, and monasticism… inestimable treasures of the Church. Among the Eastern Churches, some are in full communion with the Successor of the Apostle Peter. They enrich the Catholic communion by their impressive history and their distinctive features.

This beauty, however, is marred. Many Eastern Churches are bearing a heavy cross and have become “martyr Churches”. They carry the marks of Christ’s wounds. Just as the Lord’s flesh was pierced by nails and a lance, so many Eastern communities are suffering and bleeding because of the conflicts and violence they endure. Let us think of some of the places where they dwell: the Holy Land and Ukraine; Syria, Lebanon, the entire Middle East; the Caucasus and Tigray. It is in these very places, where great numbers of Eastern Catholics are found, that the brutality of war is felt most fiercely.

Brothers and sisters, we cannot remain indifferent. The Apostle Paul made clear the instruction he received from the other Apostles to be mindful of the neediest members of the Christian community (cf. *Gal* 2:10), and called for solidarity with them (cf. 2 *Cor* 8-9). This is God's own message, and you, the members of ROACO, are the hands that give it flesh, hands that aid and lift up those who suffer. This is why you have met in these days: not to make speeches and develop theories, not to engage in geopolitical analyses, but to discern the best ways to draw close to our brothers and sisters in the East and to alleviate their sufferings.

I beg you, then, with heart in hand, to persevere in your support for the Eastern Catholic Churches, assisting them, in these dramatic times, to remain firmly rooted in the Gospel. With your help, may they be able to do what the civil authorities ought to do for the poorest and most vulnerable, but cannot do, do not know how to do, or fail to do. Urge the clergy and religious to be ever attentive to the cries of the flock, exemplary in faith, putting the Gospel before all forms of dissension or self-interest, and united in service to the common good, since all those in the Church belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God (cf. 1 *Cor* 3:23).

Dear representatives of the various Agencies, thank you for what you do! You are evangelizers, sharers in the Church's mission and channels of the love of Jesus. How many people over the years have benefited from your generosity! You are sowers of hope, witnesses called to act, as the Gospel tells us, with kindness and discretion. Most of what you accomplish attracts little attention in the eyes of the world, yet it is pleasing in the sight of God. Thank you for responding to destruction by reconstruction; to the deprivation of dignity by restoring hope; to the tears of children with a smile that speaks of love; to the malign logic of power with the Christian logic of service. The seeds you plant in fields poisoned by hatred and war will surely blossom. They will be a prophecy of a different world, one that does not believe *that might makes right, but in the non-violent power of peace*.

I know that in recent days you have focused on the dramatic situation in the Holy Land. There everything began, there the Apostles received the mandate to go out to the whole world and preach the Gospel. The faithful throughout the world are presently called to demonstrate their closeness and to encourage Christians, there and throughout the Middle East, to rise above the temptation to abandon their lands, torn by conflicts. It makes me think of an awful situation: that these lands are being stripped of Christians. The sufferings caused by war are all the more jarring and absurd when they occur in the very places where the Gospel of peace was proclaimed! To those who fuel the spiral of conflicts and reap profit from them, I once more say: Stop! Stop, because violence will never bring peace. There is urgent need for a ceasefire, for meetings and dialogue to permit the coexistence of different peoples. This is the only possible path to a stable future. With war, a senseless and inconclusive venture, no one emerges a winner: everyone ends up defeated because war, from the very beginning, is always already a defeat. Let us listen to those who suffer its consequences, the victims and those who have lost everything. Let us hear the cry of the young, of ordinary individuals and peoples, who are weary of the rhetoric of war and

the empty slogans that constantly put the blame on others, dividing the world into good and evil, weary of leaders who find it difficult to sit at a table, negotiate and find solutions.

My thoughts also turn to the terribly tragic plight of war-torn Ukraine. I pray daily, and keep inviting others to pray, that paths of peace may open for that beloved people, that prisoners of war may be freed and children repatriated. Promoting peace and freeing prisoners are distinctive signs of Christian faith (cf. *Mt* 5:9; *Lk* 4:18); they cannot be reduced to mere displays of power. In these days, you have also focused on the humanitarian issue of displaced persons in the Karabakh region. I thank you for everything that you have done and continue to do in assisting those who suffer. I would also like to say thank you to Bishop Gevork Saroyan of the Armenian Apostolic Church for his presence during these days. As you return, I would ask you to convey my fraternal greetings to His Holiness Karekin II and to the dear people of Armenia. I had the opportunity to meet the first and the second Karekin in Buenos Aires.

Today, many Eastern Christians, perhaps more than ever before, are fleeing conflicts or migrating in search of work and better living conditions. Many, therefore, are living in the diaspora. I know that you have reflected on the pastoral care of those residing outside their traditional territory. This is a timely and significant problem. Some Churches, due to the massive migrations of recent decades, now have most of their faithful living outside their traditional territory, in places where pastoral care is often lacking due to the scarcity of priests, structures, and adequate training. As a result, those who have already had to leave their native lands behind, now also risk losing their religious identity and, with the passing of generations, the spiritual heritage of the East, an invaluable treasure for the Catholic Church, is weakened. I am grateful to the Latin dioceses that welcome Eastern Christiansand that respect their traditions. I urge them to show particular concern, so that these, our brothers and sisters, may keep their rites alive and flourishing. I encourage the Dicastery to work to this end, also by establishing principles and norms that can help Latin bishops to aid the Eastern Catholics living in the diaspora. Thank you for all that you can do.

I thank all of you for your presence! I ask you, please, to pray for me. Thank you.

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