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To the Centesimus Annus pro-Pontefice Foundation: the fight against poverty is not only an economic problem, but above all a moral question

Vatican City, 13 May 2016 – The Centesimus Annus pro-Pontefice Foundation is holding an international conference dedicated to the theme "Business initiative in the fight against poverty: the refugee emergency, our challenge" from 12 to 14 May, in the Vatican's New Synod Hall. Established by St. John Paul II in 1993, the Foundation seeks to collaborate in the study and dissemination of Christian social doctrine, as presented in particular in the encyclical "Centesimus Annus".

Pope Francis received the participants in the conference this morning in the Clementine Hall, and in his address to them he expressed his concern over the refugee crisis, recalling his recent visit to Lesbos where he witnessed heart-rending scenes of human suffering, especially on the part of families and children. "It was my intention, together with my Orthodox brothers, Patriarch Bartholomew and Archbishop Ieronymos, to make the world more aware of these 'scenes of tragic and indeed desperate need', and to 'respond in a way worthy of our common humanity'. Apart from the immediate and practical aspect of providing material relief to these brothers and sisters of ours, the international community is challenged to devise long-term political, social and economic responses to issues that transcend national and continental boundaries, and affect the entire human family."

"The fight against poverty is not merely a technical economic problem, but above all a moral one, calling for global solidarity and the development of more equitable approaches to the concrete needs and aspirations of individuals and peoples worldwide", he continued. "In the light of this demanding task, this initiative of your Foundation is most timely. Drawing inspiration from the rich patrimony of the Church's social doctrine, the present Conference is exploring from various standpoints the practical and ethical implications of the present world economy, while at the same time laying the foundations for a business and economic culture that is more inclusive and respectful of human dignity. As St. John Paul II frequently insisted, economic activity cannot be conducted in an institutional or political vacuum, but has an essential ethical component; it must always stand at the service of the human person and the universal common good."

"An economic vision geared to profit and material well-being alone is – as experience is daily showing us – incapable of contributing in a positive way to a globalisation that favours the integral development of the world's peoples, a just distribution of the earth's resources, the guarantee of dignified labour and the encouragement of private initiative and local enterprise. An economy of exclusion and inequality has led to greater numbers of the

disenfranchised and those discarded as unproductive and useless. The effects are felt even in our more developed societies, in which the growth of relative poverty and social decay represent a serious threat to families, the shrinking middle class and in a particular way our young people. The rates of unemployment for the young are not only a scandal needing to be addressed first and foremost in economic terms, but also, and no less urgently, as a social ill, for our youth are being robbed of hope and their great resources of energy, creativity and vision are being squandered."

The Pope concluded by expressing his hope that the conference may contribute to generating new models of economic progress more clearly directed towards the universal common good, inclusion and integral development, the creation of employment and investment in human resources. "The Second Vatican Council rightly pointed out that, for Christians, economic, financial and business activity cannot be separated from the duty to strive for the perfecting of the temporal order in accordance with the values of God's Kingdom."
