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Audience with the participants in the International Conference promoted by the Pontifical Council for Culture

At 11.30 this morning, in the Paul VI Hall of the Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the international conference on regenerative medicine promoted by the Pontifical Council for Culture in collaboration with the *Cura Foundation*, *STOQ* and *Stem for Life Foundation*, taking place in the Vatican from 26 to 28 April on the theme: "Unite to Cure – A Global Health Care Initiative".

The following is the Pope's address to those present at the meeting:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear friends, good morning!

I offer a warm welcome to all of you. I thank Cardinal Ravasi for his kind words of greeting and for having organized this meeting, which deals with a broad variety of topics that go well beyond a theoretical reflection and indicate new directions for the future.

I am gratified to see people from different cultures, societies and religions come together to set out on a common journey of reflection and commitment to care for the sick, since concern for the human person is truly what unites us. The problem of human suffering challenges us to create new means of interaction between individuals and institutions, breaking down barriers and working together to enhance patient care.

My gratitude goes to all who have contributed to this project of the Pontifical Council for Culture and related institutions: the Vatican Science and Faith Foundation (STOQ), the Cura Foundation and the Stem for Life Foundation. In a special way, I thank the various dicasteries of the Holy See that have cooperated in this undertaking: the Secretariat of State – Section for Relations with States, the Pontifical Academy of Life, the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and the Secretariat for Communication.

The work of this Conference is summed up in four verbs: Prevent, Repair, Cure and Prepare for the Future. I would like to offer a brief reflection on each of these.

We are increasingly aware that many evils can be avoided if greater attention is paid to the style of life we adopt and the culture we promote. Prevention involves taking a farsighted look at human beings and the environment in which we live. It means aiming for a culture of balance, whose essential factors – education, physical activity, diet, the protection of the environment, respect for the “health codes” practiced by the various religions, timely and precise diagnosis, and so many others – can help us to live better, with fewer health risks.

This is all the more important when we think of children and of young people, who are increasingly at risk because of illnesses linked to the radical changes of modern culture. We need but reflect on the impact on health caused by smoking, alcohol consumption, and toxins released in the air, in the water and in the soil (cf. *Laudato si'*, 20). A number of tumours and other health problems in adults could be avoided by adopting preventive measures during childhood. Yet this would require constant global action; this cannot be delegated to social and governmental institutions, but demands commitment on the part of all. It is urgent to foster everywhere a culture of prevention as the first step in health care.

We must also acknowledge with deep satisfaction the great strides made by scientific research in discovering and making available new cures, especially those related to the delicate problem of rare, autoimmune and neurodegenerative diseases, as well as of many others. In recent years, advances in cellular research and in the field of regenerative medicine have opened new horizons in the areas of tissue repair and experimental therapies; this significant chapter in scientific and human progress is alluded to in the theme of your meeting by the terms: repair and cure. The more you are committed to research, the more relevant and effective these aspects will become, thus enabling an increasingly adequate, incisive and even personalized response to the needs of the sick.

Science is a powerful means for better understanding the natural world and human health. It has opened up new possibilities and provided refined technologies that enable us not only to examine the deepest structure of living organisms, including man, but also to intervene in ways so profound and precise as to make it possible even to modify our DNA. Here we see the need for an increased awareness of our ethical responsibility towards humanity and the environment in which we live. While the Church applauds every effort in research and application directed to the care of our suffering brothers and sisters, she is also mindful of the basic principle that “not everything technically possible or doable is thereby ethically acceptable”. Science, like all other human activities, is conscious that certain limits must be respected for the good of humanity itself, and that a sense of ethical responsibility is needed. The true measure of progress, as Blessed Paul VI recalled, is that it is directed to the good of every man and the whole man (cf. *Populorum Progressio*, 14).

If we wish to prepare for the future and to ensure the well-being of each human person, we must grow in sensitivity as the means at our disposal become all the more potent. This is our responsibility to one another and to all living creatures. For human health needs to be considered in a broader context, not only in relation to scientific research but also to our ability to preserve and protect the natural environment. There is also a need to take into consideration every member of our human family, especially those experiencing social and cultural hardships that endanger both their health and their access to adequate care.

Thinking of the future thus means setting out on a twofold path. The first, anchored in an open interdisciplinary approach that engages multiple experts and institutions, can lead to a reciprocal exchange of knowledge. The second is made up of concrete actions on behalf of those who suffer. Both these directions call for a convergence of efforts and ideas that engage various communities: scientists and physicians, patients, families, ethicists, cultural and religious leaders, philanthropists, and representatives of governments and business. I am particularly happy that this process is already underway, and that this Conference has, in a symbolic way, brought many of you together for the benefit of all.

I encourage you, then, to pursue with boldness and determination the ideals that have brought you together and that are already a part of your academic and cultural itinerary. I accompany you and give you my blessing; and I

ask you please to pray for me. Thank you.
