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## Message of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue on the occasion of the Buddhist feast of Vesakh/Hanamatsuri 2019

Vesakh is the most important feast for Buddhists: it commemorates the main events in the life of Buddha.

The feast of Vesakh/Hanamatsuri 2019, in the various countries of Buddhist culture, is celebrated on different dates, in accordance with the different traditions. This year the feast will be celebrated in the majority of countries of Buddhist tradition on 19 May.

For the occasion, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue has sent the following message to Buddhists:

### *Buddhists and Christians: Promoting the Dignity and Equal Rights of Women and Girls*

Dear Buddhist Friends,

1. On behalf of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, I extend warm greetings and prayerful good wishes for your celebration of *Vesakh*. May it bring joy and peace to all of you, and to your families and your communities.
2. This year our message is inspired by the *Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*, signed in Abu Dhabi on 4 February 2019 by Pope Francis and Sheikh Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, Grand Imam of Al-Azhar. That document includes an important call for people everywhere to promote the dignity of women and children.
3. The teachings of Jesus and the Buddha promote the dignity of women. Both Buddhism and Christianity have taught that women and men are equal in dignity, and both have played an important role in the advancement of women. Buddhist and Christian women have made significant contributions to our religious traditions and to society as a whole. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that all too often women have also experienced

discrimination and maltreatment. At times, religious narratives were used to present women as somehow inferior to men.

4. In our day, violence against women and young girls is a global problem, affecting as much as a third of the world's female population. Situations of conflict, post-conflict and displacement favour such violence. Women and young girls are especially vulnerable to human trafficking and modern slavery, and these forms of brutality negatively and often irreversibly affect their health. To counter these injustices, it is vital to provide young women and girls access to education, to guarantee them equal pay for equal work, to ensure the recognition of their inheritance and property rights, to overcome their under-representation in politics, government and decision-making, to address the issue of dowries, and so forth. The promotion of women's equal dignity and rights should also be reflected in interreligious dialogue: more women need to have a place at the table, where they are still outnumbered by men.

5. Dear friends, urgent action is needed to protect women and to defend their fundamental rights and freedom. As the *Document on Human Fraternity* states: "It is an essential requirement to recognize the right of women to education and employment, and to recognize their freedom to exercise their own political rights. Moreover, efforts must be made to free women from historical and social conditioning that runs contrary to the principles of their faith and dignity. It is also necessary to protect women from sexual exploitation and from being treated as merchandise or objects of pleasure or financial gain. Accordingly, an end must be brought to all those inhuman and vulgar practices that denigrate the dignity of women. Efforts must be made to modify those laws that prevent women from fully enjoying their rights".

6. Those in authority and positions of leadership have a special responsibility to encourage their followers to uphold the dignity of women and young girls, and to defend their fundamental human rights. We are likewise called to alert our brothers and sisters to the dangers inherent within gender ideology, which denies the differences and the reciprocity of men and women. In promoting the dignity and equality of women and young girls, may we also promote and protect the institution of marriage, motherhood and family life.

7. Dear Buddhist friends, let us make every effort to foster within our families, communities and institutions a renewed appreciation of the central place of women in our world and work for the definitive rejection of every form of unjust discrimination against the human person. In this spirit, I wish you once again a peaceful and joyful feast of *Vesakh!*

Bishop Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, M.C.C.J.

*Secretary*

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