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Apostolic Trip of His Holiness Francis to Thailand and Japan (19 to 26 November 2019) – Welcome Ceremony, Meeting with the Prime Minister and Meeting with the Authorities

Welcome Ceremony at Government House, Bangkok, and Private Meeting with the Prime Minister

**Meeting with the Authorities, Representatives of Civil Society and the Diplomatic Corps at Government House,
Bangkok**

Welcome Ceremony at Government House, Bangkok, and Private Meeting with the Prime Minister

This morning, at 8.45 local time (2.45 in Rome), the Holy Father Francis left the apostolic nunciature and transferred by car to the Government House in Bangkok for the ceremony welcoming him to Thailand.

Upon arrival, the Pope was received in the courtyard by the prime minister of Thailand, General Prayuth Chan-ocha, and they proceeded to the podium. Then, after passing by the Guard of Honour, and following the execution of the anthems and presentation of the delegations, the Holy Father and the prime minister transferred to the entrance to the Inner Ivory Room for their private meeting.

After the official photograph, the signing of the Book of Honour, the exchange of gifts and the presentation of the prime minister's consort took place in the antechamber of the Inner Ivory Room. The Pope and General Prayuth Chan-ocha then retired for their private meeting.

At the end of the meeting, the Holy Father and the prime minister transferred to the Inner Santi Maitri Hall for the meeting with the political and religious authorities, representatives of civil society and the members of the diplomatic corps of Thailand.

Meeting with the Authorities, Representatives of Civil Society and the Diplomatic Corps at Government House, Bangkok

At 9.30 local time (3.30 in Rome), the Holy Father Francis met with the political and religious authorities, representatives of civil society and the members of the diplomatic corps of Thailand in the Inner Santi Maitri Hall in Government House, Bangkok.

After the greeting speech from the Prime Minister of Thailand, General Prayuth Chan-ocha, the Pope delivered his address.

At the end of the meeting, the Holy Father took leave of the prime minister and transferred by car to Wat Ratchabophit Sathit Maha Simaram Temple for a visit to the Supreme Patriarch of Buddhists, Somdej Phra Maha Muneewong.

The following is the address given by the Pope during the meeting with political and religious authorities, representatives of civil society and members of the diplomatic corps:

Address of the Holy Father

Mr Prime Minister,
Members of the Government and the Diplomatic Corps,
Distinguished Political, Civil and Religious Leaders,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am grateful for this opportunity to be with you and to be able to visit this land so rich in natural beauty, and the splendid guardian of age-old spiritual and cultural traditions, like that of the hospitality I have personally experienced, and which I would like in turn to spread, thus increasing bonds of greater friendship between peoples.

I thank you, Mr Prime Minister, for your welcome and for your kind words of introduction, and for your attentive and humble gesture. I am grateful that this afternoon I will have the opportunity to pay a courtesy visit to His Majesty King Rama X and the royal family. I once more thank His Majesty for his gracious invitation to visit Thailand and I renew my best wishes for his reign, while paying sincere homage to the memory of his late father.

I am happy to be able to greet and address you, governmental, religious and civil leaders, and through you to greet the entire Thai people. I likewise address a respectful greeting to the diplomatic corps. On this occasion, I readily offer my good wishes in the wake of the recent elections, which signified a return to the normal democratic process.

I thank, too, all those who worked to make this visit possible.

We know that the challenges facing our world today are indeed global problems, embracing the entire human family and calling for a firm commitment to international justice and solidarity between peoples. I consider it significant to note that, in these days, Thailand will conclude its chairmanship of ASEAN, an expression of its historic engagement with the broader issues and challenges facing the peoples of the entire South East Asia region and also its continuing interest in fostering political, economic and cultural cooperation in the region.

As a multi-ethnic and diverse nation, Thailand has long known the importance of building harmony and peaceful coexistence between its numerous ethnic groups, while showing respect and appreciation for different cultures, religious groups, thoughts and ideas. Our age is marked by a globalization that is all too often viewed in narrowly

economic terms, tending to erase the distinguishing features that shape the beauty and soul of our peoples. Yet the experience of a unity that respects and makes room for diversity serves as an inspiration and incentive for all those concerned about the kind of world we wish to leave to our children.

I am pleased to know of your initiative to create a social ethics commission and to invite the traditional religions of the country to take part, so as to receive their contributions and to keep alive the spiritual memory of your people. In this regard, I will have the opportunity to meet with the Supreme Buddhist Patriarch as a sign of the importance and urgency of promoting friendship and interreligious dialogue, also in the service of social harmony and the building of just, responsive and inclusive societies. I would like personally to assure you of the full commitment of Thailand's small but vibrant Catholic community to maintain and promote the distinctive characteristics of the Thai people, as evoked in your national anthem: peaceful and loving, but not cowardly. They are likewise firmly resolved to confront all that would lead us to be insensitive to the cry of our many brothers and sisters who yearn to be freed from the yoke of poverty, violence and injustice. This land bears the name "freedom". We know that freedom is possible only if we are capable of feeling co-responsible for one another and of eliminating every form of inequality. Hence the need to ensure that individuals and communities can have access to education, dignified labour and health care, and in this way attain the indispensable minimal levels of sustainability that can enable an integral human development.

Here I would like to dwell briefly on the movements of migration that are one of the defining signs of our time. Not so much for the movements in themselves, as for the conditions in which they take place, a phenomenon that represents one of the principal moral issues facing our generation. The global crisis of migration cannot be ignored. Thailand itself, known for the welcome it has given to migrants and refugees, has experienced this crisis as a result of the tragic flight of refugees from nearby countries. Once more, I express my hope that the international community will act with responsibility and foresight, will work to resolve the issues that have led to this tragic exodus, and will promote safe, orderly and regulated migration. May every nation devise effective means for protecting the dignity and rights of migrants and refugees, who face dangers, uncertainty and exploitation in their quest for freedom and a decent life for their families. It is not just about migrants; it is also about the face we want to give to our societies.

Here I think, too, of all those women and children of our time, especially those who are wounded, violated and exposed to every form of exploitation, enslavement, violence and abuse. I express my appreciation for the Thai government's efforts to extirpate this scourge, and for all those private individuals and organizations working to uproot this evil and to provide ways to restore their dignity. In this year that marks the thirtieth anniversary of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child and Adolescent*, we are all invited to reflect on the need to protect the welfare of our children, their social and intellectual development, their access to schooling, and their physical, psychological and spiritual growth (cf. *Address to the Diplomatic Corps*, 7 January 2019). The future of our peoples is linked in large measure to the way we will ensure a dignified future to our children.

Dear friends, today, more than ever, our societies need "artisans of hospitality", men and women committed to the integral development of all peoples within a human family committed to dwelling in justice, solidarity and fraternal harmony. Each of you, in various ways, has devoted your life to enabling the service of the common good to reach every corner of this nation; this is one of the noblest tasks any person can undertake. With these sentiments, and with prayerful good wishes that you may persevere in the mission entrusted to you, I invoke every divine blessing on this beloved nation, on its leaders and its people. And I ask the Lord to guide each of you, and your families, in the ways of wisdom, justice and peace. Thank you!
