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## Audience with Leaders and Delegates of the Italian General Confederation of Labour (CGIL)

This morning, in the Paul VI Hall, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the leaders and delegates of the Italian General Confederation of Labour (*Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro, CGIL*).

The following is the address delivered by the Pope during the meeting:

### Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

I welcome you and thank the secretary general for his words. This meeting with you, who form one of Italy's historic trade union organizations, invites me to express once more my closeness to the world of work, in particular to the people and families who are struggling the most.

There is no trade union without workers, and there are no free workers without trade unions. We live in an era that, despite technological advances - and sometimes precisely because of that perverse system defined as technocracy (cf. *Laudato si'*, 106-114) - has to some extent disappointed expectations of justice in the labour sphere. And this calls first of all for a fresh start in the value of labour, as a place where personal vocation and the social dimension meet. Working allows the person to realize him- or herself, to experience fraternity, to cultivate social friendship and to improve the world. The Encyclicals *Laudato si'* and *Fratelli tutti* can help to undertake paths of formation that offer reasons for commitment in the time in which we are living.

*Work builds society.* It is a first experience of citizenship, in which a community of destiny takes shape, the fruit of the commitment and talents of each person; such a community is much more than the sum of its various professional skills, because each person is recognized in the relationship with others and for others. And in this way, in the ordinary fabric of connections between people and economic and political projects, the fabric of "democracy" comes to life day by day. It is a fabric that is not designed at a desk in an office, but rather with creative industriousness in factories, workshops, farms, commercial and artisanal activities, construction sites,

public administration, schools, offices, and so on. It comes from grass roots, from reality.

Dear friends, if I invoke this vision, it is because one of the tasks of the trade union is to educate in the meaning of labour, promoting fraternity between workers. This formative concern cannot be lacking. It is the salt of a healthy economy, capable of making the world better. Indeed, “human costs always include economic costs, and economic dysfunctions always involve human costs. To stop investing in people, in order to gain greater short-term financial gain, is bad business for society” (Encyclical *Laudato si'*, 128).

Besides formation, it is always necessary to *point out the distortions of work*. The culture of waste has seeped into the folds of economic relations, and it has also invaded the world of work. It is found, for instance, where human dignity is trampled by gender discrimination – why should a woman earn less than a man? Why is a woman dismissed, as soon as she is seen to be “showing”, so as to avoid paying maternity leave? We see it in the precariousness of employment of the young – why should life choices have to be delayed due to chronic precariousness? Or again, in the culture of redundancy; and why are the most demanding jobs still so poorly protected? Too many people suffer from lack of employment or undignified employment: they deserve to be heard, they deserve commitment on the part of trade unions.

I would like to share with you some concerns in particular. First of all, the *safety of workers*. Your secretary general spoke about this. There are still too many deaths – I see them in the newspapers, there is one every day – too many people maimed and injured in the workplace. Every death in the workplace is a defeat for society as a whole. Rather than counting them at the end of each year, we should remember their names, because they are people, not numbers. We cannot allow profit and people to be equated! The idolatry of money tends to override everyone and everything, and does not safeguard differences. It is a matter of educating ourselves to value the lives of employees and of educating ourselves to take the safety regulations seriously: only a wise alliance can prevent those “accidents” which are tragedies for families and communities.

A second concern is the *exploitation of people*, as though they were performance machines. There are violent forms, such as illegal hiring (*caporalato*) and the enslavement of labourers on farms, building sites and in other workplaces, the coercion of workers into gruelling shifts, undercutting in contracts, the disregard for motherhood, the conflict between work and family. How many contradictions and how many wars between the poor take place in relation to work! In recent years the so-called “working poor” have increased: people who, while employed, are unable to maintain their families and give hope for the future. Trade unions – listen carefully to this – are required to be a voice for the voiceless. You must make a noise to give voice to the voiceless. In particular, I advise attention to the young, who are often forced into precarious, inadequate, even slave-like contracts. I thank you for every initiative that favours active labour policies and protects the dignity of people.

Furthermore, in these years of the pandemic the number of resignations has increased. Young people, and the less young, are dissatisfied with their profession, the atmosphere in the workplace, and contractual forms, and prefer to resign. They look for other opportunities. This phenomenon does not imply disengagement, but rather the need to humanize work. In this case too, the trade union can carry out preventive work, focusing on the quality of employment and accompanying people towards a relocation more suited to their talents.

Dear friends, I invite you to be “sentinels” of the world of work, generating alliances and not sterile oppositions. People yearn for peace, especially at this historical moment, and everyone’s contribution is fundamental. Educating in peace even in the workplace, often marked by conflicts, can become a sign of hope for all, also for the future generations.

Thank you for what you do, and will do, for the poor, migrants, vulnerable and disabled people, and the unemployed. Do not neglect to take care also of those who do not join the union because they have lost their trust; and make space for youthful responsibility.

I entrust you to the protection of Saint Joseph, who knew the beauty and toil of doing one's job well and the satisfaction of earning bread for the family. Let us look to him and his ability to educate through work. I wish all of you and your loved ones a peaceful Christmas. May the Lord bless you and may Our Lady protect you. And if

you can, please pray for me. Thank you!

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