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GALVANIZING MULTILATERAL EFFORTS FOR THE ERADICATION OF POVERTY,
QUALITY EDUCATION, CLIMATE ACTION AND INCLUSION

[Effective Multilateralism]

Mr. President,

At the outset, I would like to extend the warm greetings of Pope Francis to you and to all of the Delegations participating in this 74th Session of the UN General Assembly.

Keenly aware that, in our day, relationships within the international community are experiencing particular tension and fragmentation, Pope Francis tirelessly urges every actor on the international stage to strive to promote dialogue at every level, as this is an indispensable step and “the antidote” to every division. Existing international institutions, in this regard, offer a forum for dialogue and we welcome the opportunity of this General Assembly to seek a more “United” Nations. His Holiness dedicated his 2019 New Year’s Address to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See to the theme of multilateralism.¹ Insisting on its central role in the life of the international community, he offered the representatives of States an analysis of the challenges facing multilateralism and proposed ways to reinvigorate it. It is fitting, therefore, that the theme of the General Debate of this Seventy-fourth Session of the United Nations General Assembly is dedicated to galvanizing multilateral efforts for the eradication of poverty, quality education, climate action and inclusion. “Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home [... and] we have the freedom needed to limit and direct technology; we can put it at the service of another type of progress, one which is healthier, more human, more social, more integral”.²

¹ Pope Francis, Address to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See for the Traditional Exchange of New Year’s Greetings, 7 January 2019.

² Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si’*, nn. 13 and 112.

For Pope Francis, the failure to recognize that the international community is a family of nations that shares a common destiny and a common home is at the heart of today's manifold challenges facing multilateralism. Unilateral action in response to international challenges, narrow partisan or nationalistic policies that exclude and alienate, the domination of the powerful over the weak, the imposition of the will and ideologies of the haves over the have-nots are just some of the manifestations of a failure to recognize others equally as members of one human family, thus allowing a climate of fear, mistrust and opposition to prevail.

Referring to the centenary of the creation of the League of Nations this year, His Holiness reminded that the reasons behind its failure reveal that multilateral diplomacy requires, first and foremost, the good will and good faith of the parties, their readiness to cooperate and treat one another with respect, honesty and fairness, and the openness to find common solutions to overcome disputes. It also demands the joint pursuit of the common good, the primacy of justice and the rule of law, the support and development of those who are most in need and the defense of the vulnerable. These qualities are the marks of a united family whose members live in mutual respect, peace and harmony, and they are the necessary condition to the promotion of the common good for the benefit of all.

In recent years, we have seen the value of effective multilateralism, for example, in lifting millions out of poverty, resolving various conflicts, protecting our common home, fighting against epidemics of infectious diseases, and caring for migrants and refugees. At the same time, we are painfully aware of the many ways in which international cooperation and commitment have been inadequate to the challenges faced.

Among such challenges, we must consider the situation in the Middle East, and of the various conflicts, especially in Syria and Yemen, which demand effective cooperation and the courageous commitment of the family of nations to put an end to the immense suffering of so many people and to set out on the road that leads to peace and reconstruction. The Israeli-Palestinian peace process, which has been going on for a long time, is of perennial concern and it runs the risk of seeing the advancement of unilateral measures and solutions instead of a collaborative response from the international community. How wonderful it would be to start from a concrete and symbolic commitment, which could and should be found for Jerusalem, a place that has a historic vocation to be a city of peace! May the international community agree to resume and realize that intent of the first and fundamental UN resolution for a special status, internationally guaranteed for Jerusalem, which ensures the historical, material and religious character of the holy places to the three monotheistic religions. What a sign of hope this would be for a renewed commitment by the United Nations!

Another area of pressing concern involves the situation in Venezuela and in Nicaragua, where institutional channels must be fully availed of in the search for negotiated solutions to the political, social and economic problems, in easing the tensions and in alleviating the suffering of the population. In this regard, it is important also that the recommendations presented by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights be fulfilled.

Among the positive signs is the extension for another year of the mandate, as established by Security Council Resolution 2366 (2017) of the UN Verification Mission in Colombia. Notwithstanding many obstacles, the ongoing peace process in Colombia remains an inspiring example for the world of effective multilateralism.

As we mark the centenary of the establishment of the League of Nations and prepare next year for the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations, it is crucial to revitalize the ethos of international cooperation. That is why galvanizing effective multilateralism is one of the most important priorities for the international community, since it is a precondition for addressing so many of our day's greatest challenges.

[Multilateralism in the pursuit of peace and security]

Mr. President,

One of those great challenges is the absence of peace and security in many parts of the world. The United Nations was founded after two world wars to catalyze international cooperation, so as to prevent the scourge of another, and to do so through the promotion of peace based on fundamental human rights, integral human development and the observance of international law. Some of the most notable achievements in the history of the United Nations have involved multilateral cooperation in bringing peace to war-torn areas. Others have benefited from the less conspicuous, but equally crucial, collaboration in peacebuilding that has prevented conflicts from erupting or reemerging.

As the *Report of the Secretary-General on the Work of the Organization* describes, such joint action has recently, to different degrees, helped to ease volatile situations, resolve conflicts and reestablish paths to peace in some countries and regions, such as in South Sudan and the Central African Republic or between Eritrea and Ethiopia. At the same time, however, armed conflicts, violent extremism, and terrorism continue to menace and destabilize many parts of the world, uprooting over 70 million people.³

³ *Report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization (A/74/1)*, paragraphs 15, 59, 63.

In our common efforts to prevent conflicts, end wars through mediation, and build post-conflict peace and reconciliation, it is opportune to recall Security Council Resolution 1888 (2009) on the tenth anniversary of its adoption. This is a welcome occasion to renew our dedication to protecting women and children from widespread sexual violence during armed conflict, to boosting the inclusion of women in preventive diplomacy, conflict resolution, peacebuilding, humanitarian and other post-conflict processes, and to training peacekeepers, national forces and police in order to enhance the effectiveness of measures for the protection of women and children by peacekeeping missions. Sexual violence is degrading, dehumanizing and a grave violation of the victim's rights and dignity. The use of sexual violence as a weapon of war is absolutely unacceptable and must be stopped. In the face of such heinous crimes, we must never overlook the plight of those children conceived as a result of sexual violence in war. Both mothers and children are innocent victims. They must be protected, assisted and rehabilitated without being separated from their families and communities. No effort must be spared to ensure their full reintegration into society.

The proliferation of weapons is particularly alarming as it spurs and exacerbates violence, conflict and war. The Secretary-General's *Report* documents that armed groups are multiplying, worldwide military spending and arms competition are increasing, and the threat of the weaponization of artificial intelligence, cyberspace and outer space is growing.⁴ In some places, young people sadly are more adept with guns and rounds of ammunition than they are with pens and schoolbooks. Without greater international and regional cooperation, and awareness of the dangers and responsibilities related to the production and movement of arms, especially among weapon-producing States, the cycle of death, destruction and disruption will simply continue. In order to tackle the problem of illicit arms trafficking, it is necessary to work to promote, especially through education, a real culture of life and peace that may respond effectively to the causes that are at the basis of the demand of such weapons.

Greater multilateral cooperation is likewise needed to create the conditions and take steps necessary for the elimination of nuclear weapons. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) are both important steps toward a nuclear weapons-free world. They are the fruit of the efforts of many States and other stakeholders to promote greater awareness and understanding of the humanitarian consequences and environmental disasters that would result from the use of nuclear weapons and are complements, not distractions, to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), which will have its tenth Review Conference next year.

The entry into force and full implementation of such Treaties can happen only if mutual trust exists. They are more than just legal obligations; they are moral commitments based on trust

⁴ *Report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization (A/74/1)*, paragraph 112.

among States. Such trust has been seriously eroded by both the recent lack of progress in nuclear disarmament and by the decision of some States to develop new nuclear weapons capabilities or “modernize” and “upgrade” existing ones. This deterioration of trust not only imperils the achievement of true and lasting peace among nations, but also undermines the foundations for multilateralism in general. It is for this reason that the Secretary-General has said that “disarmament and non-proliferation [must] be put at the center of the work of the United Nations.”⁵ Strengthening dialogue and rebuilding trust are a difficult endeavor, but there is no other path available to guarantee common collective security and lasting peace.

[Multilateralism in the Eradication of Poverty]

Mr. President,

One of the triumphs of multilateralism in recent years has been the global mobilization to lift people out of extreme poverty. The implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, in addition to other achievements, has helped lift nearly a billion people out of extreme poverty.⁶ The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is an unprecedented multilateral commitment to help the more than 731 million people⁷ still in extreme poverty not only be freed from that situation of abject deprivation, but continue to rise above the poverty line through addressing the many factors that are necessary for their integral development.

Yet, as the Secretary-General’s *Report* notes, while much progress has been achieved, if we continue at the present pace, the targets may not be reached by 2030. Ten percent of the world’s population still live on under two dollars a day and struggle to access basic health care, education, water and sanitation. World hunger grew in 2018, after years of decline. The population of working poor has increased and millions, especially women and youth, remain without work.⁸ Four years into the implementation of the Agenda, our efforts need to be sustained and intensified. Such conditions are shameful in an era like ours, with so many technical means and capabilities available to address them!

One crucial way to work toward the reduction of poverty is through adequate employment. During this centenary of the International Labour Organization, which has sought to promote suitable working conditions and increase the dignity of workers, it is urgent for us to focus on the importance of decent work, not only in lifting them and those they support out of poverty, but in their overall personal development. Integral human development does not mean only

⁵ *Report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization (A/74/1)*, paragraph 112.

⁶ *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2015*, United Nations.

⁷ PovcalNet, The World Bank, March 21, 2019 Report (<http://iresearch.worldbank.org/PovcalNet/introduction.aspx>).

⁸ *Report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization (A/74/1)*, paragraph 8.

the reduction of poverty; it also implies, inter alia, access to quality education and health care, clean drinking water and sanitation, reliable social protection systems and infrastructures.

It is essential as we work toward poverty reduction that we do not lose sight of the fundamental human coordinates that must motivate and guide development work. Without them, there is the risk that the global development agenda is understood only superficially and partially, and that the means to achieve such development, whether economic, environmental or sociological, be considered as ends in themselves, thus missing the deeper ethical and anthropological context and purposes. If we exclude from our focus these deeper questions about the why-behind-the-what of development, then the enormous international developmental infrastructure can end up being used in some circumstances to undermine the very development and peace they were designed to advance.

When Pope Francis spoke to the General Assembly four years ago, immediately before the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, he emphasized that the new paradigm for development called for by the Agenda must begin with the core principle of the dignity of each human person and must recognize that extreme poverty is primarily a denial of that dignity. “Above and beyond our plans and programs,” he said, “we are dealing with real men and women who live, struggle and suffer, and are often forced to live in great poverty, deprived of all rights.”⁹ When we focus on the primacy of the human dignity of every impoverished man or woman, boy or girl, we immediately recognize the need to help them shape their own integral development as subjects not objects. “To enable these real men and women to escape from extreme poverty,” the Pope accentuated, “we must allow them to be dignified agents of their own destiny.”¹⁰ Through providing adequate education and health care, strengthening family life across the generations, and many other means, we not only do not leave them behind, but also equip them to move forward.

[Multilateralism in the provision of quality education]

Mr. President,

Education is a fundamental enabler and key to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Agenda. That is why the international community committed itself resolutely in Sustainable Development Goal 4 to ensure that by 2030 all girls and boys have access to early childhood development, care and preprimary education, to free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education, and to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education. These commitments flowed from the fact that there are 61 million children of

⁹ Pope Francis, Address at the General Assembly of the United Nations, 25 September 2015.

¹⁰ Ibid.

primary school age who do not have access to formal education and another 202 million children of secondary level who do not attend school.¹¹ Another 130 million go to schools that are of such poor quality that they do not acquire even the basics of literacy or numeracy.¹² In many places, girls face multiple barriers to entering primary and secondary schools and in one out of every three countries there is still, in primary education, no parity between boys and girls in access to schooling.¹³

When Pope Francis addressed the General Assembly in 2015, he spoke three times about the “right to education” and said this principle “is ensured first and foremost by respecting and reinforcing the primary right of the family to educate its children, as well as the right of churches and social groups to support and assist families in the education of their children. Education conceived in this way,” he emphasized, “is the basis for the implementation of the *2030 Agenda*.”¹⁴ There must be a concerted multilateral commitment to ensuring it.

Over the course of its 2,000-year history, the Catholic Church has played a major role in the creation of schools, universities and other forms of institutions of learning in so many places, providing education to children, orphans, uneducated adults, immigrants and refugees, and those with learning and other disabilities who were being totally left behind. Catholic religious Orders have been founded with the explicit purpose and charism to educate children at a time when none but the richest families with private tutors received any formal education at all. Various women’s religious Orders sought to provide girls, especially poor girls, with quality education.

Today the Catholic Church runs approximately two hundred twenty thousand (220,000) schools in pre-University levels in all regions of the world, educating more than sixty-five million (65,000,000) children and youth, and Catholic Colleges and Universities educate three million more.¹⁵ More than half of these students are girls, and many of them are not Catholic and or even Christian; they belong to other religions or have no religion. These schools seek to supplant neither parents nor the State: they assist parents, who are the first teachers of their children, giving them the opportunity to choose the education of their children; and they help the State to provide wider educational opportunities. Catholic schools aim to impart not just information but formation, helping children and youth become not merely smarter, but wiser and better.

¹¹ *Learning To Realize Education’s Promise*, A World Bank Group Flagship Report, 2018, pp. 8, 60.

¹² <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/10-barriers-to-education-around-the-world-2/>

¹³ <https://en.unesco.org/news/while-recognizing-progress-parity-access-education-unesco-calls-increased-efforts-quality-and>.

¹⁴ Pope Francis, Address at the General Assembly of the United Nations, 25 September 2015.

¹⁵ http://www.fides.org/en/news/64944-VATICAN_CATHOLIC_CHURCH_STATISTICS_2018.

In his Encyclical letter *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis encouraged everyone to cooperate in caring for our common home and to confront together the challenges that the international community faces. Recently, he launched the “Educational Alliance” wherein he renewed the invitation to dialogue on how we are shaping the future of our planet and the need to employ the talents of all, since all change requires an educational process aimed at developing a new universal solidarity and a more welcoming society. Pope Francis believes that: “Never before has there been such need to unite our efforts in a broad *educational alliance*, to form mature individuals capable of overcoming division and antagonism, and to restore the fabric of relationships for the sake of a more fraternal humanity [...] We are experiencing an era of change: a transformation that is not only cultural but also anthropological, creating a new semantics while indiscriminately discarding traditional paradigms”.¹⁶ In this transformation process, we must have the courage to place the human person at the center and to work for the promotion of an integral ecology, which is based on the inseparable bonds among concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society and interior peace.

[Multilateralism in climate action]

Mr. President,

When it comes to care for our common home and the threat posed by climate change, the international community has been galvanizing its multilateral collaboration. We saw it with the Paris Agreement in 2015. We witnessed it again last December in Katowice, with the adoption of the “Katowice Rulebook” to implement the Paris Agreement. We witnessed it once more earlier this week during the Climate Action Summit to help enhance national commitments on greenhouse gas reductions, energy efficiency and renewable energy, as well as to strengthen mitigation and adaptation measures, to promote sustainable models of production and consumption, to develop circular economy approaches, to build resilient societies and to showcase transformations in high-emitting industries.

In spite of these multilateral commitments, there is a clear and urgent need for more determined political will and greater global cooperation in providing the resources to implement those commitments. In this regard, the *Report of the Secretary-General* states that at its present pace, the world is not heading towards reducing global temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, but rather toward a 3 to 5 degree increase, which would have catastrophic consequences.¹⁷

¹⁶ Pope Francis, Message for the launch of the Global Educational Alliance, 12 September 2019.

¹⁷ *Report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization (A/74/1)*, paragraphs 2, 50.

To enhance a multilateral response, there is a particularly urgent need for a transparent framework to promote trust among nations in fulfilling the commitments made. There is a need for more effective multilateral cooperation between the developed and developing world, for example, on financing measures to curb climate change, on technology transfer, on energy issues, and on how to apply the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capacities”¹⁸ in burden-sharing. We can and we must achieve the goals we set out to accomplish for the sake of future generations. As encouraged by Pope Francis at the Climate Action Summit some days ago, we have to pursue this effort with honesty, courage and responsibility.

As we care for our common home, we must give special attention to the Amazon, where numerous fires have devastated the region. We all recognize how important the Amazon is for the whole world and indeed for the very future of humanity. As Pope Francis underlined, “when these forests are burned down or leveled for purposes of cultivation, within the space of a few years countless species are lost and the areas frequently become arid wastelands.”¹⁹ Beginning a week from tomorrow, on October 6, Pope Francis will gather in the Vatican a Synod of Bishops from all over the world for the Amazonian Region which will be focused principally on the ecclesial and pastoral challenges of the area, with particular attention given to indigenous peoples living there and the human, ecological, social and economic issues that are impacting the region and, indeed, humanity.

The Amazon is not the only important ecosystem and vast biome facing serious threats. The Congo Basin, the rainforests in Southeast Asia, as well as national forests and vegetation covers, are similarly at risk. In his visit to Madagascar last month, Pope Francis emphasized the grave dangers confronting the country’s unique and rich biodiversity and forests. In his Address to the Authorities, Civil Society and Diplomatic Corps accredited in Antananarivo, the Pope called on them to protect the country’s “treasure... in plant and animal biodiversity” that “is especially threatened by excessive deforestation,” the deterioration of which “compromises the future of the country and of the earth, our common home.”²⁰

[Multilateralism and inclusion]

Mr. President,

¹⁸ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Art. 3.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Pope Francis. Address to the Authorities, Civil Society and the Diplomatic Corps, Antananarivo, 7 September 2019.

The culture of effective multilateralism is one of cooperation and dialogue. It seeks to involve as many as possible in joint commitment and action. It is necessarily inclusive of different peoples, cultures, religions and traditions.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development commits the international community, in Goal 16, to promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, through providing access to justice for all, and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions. Full integral development and the pursuit of peace will never thrive in a culture of exclusion in which people do not have effective access to institutions that are at the service of all.

To ensure that no one is excluded from the benefits of economic development, there must be a multilateral commitment to prosperity for all through opening up economic participation to individuals and peoples. People need access to adequate health care, which is why this week's High-Level Summit on Universal Health Coverage is so important. The Catholic Church is the largest non-government provider of health care services in the world, with some forty thousand institutions, almost two thirds of them in developing countries.²¹ The Church runs 26 percent of the world's health care facilities.²² As with education, healthcare institutions run by the Catholic Church serve the common good and society; as such, they usually receive the encouragement and support of governments. It is regretful, however, that their work at the service of peoples is sometimes impeded, especially when this is due to political or even ideological reasons.

People likewise need access to the enjoyment of all their fundamental human rights, which is often denied in situations of conflict or widespread violence, disasters and institutional failure. On this year's seventieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, Pope Francis recalled that these important international legal instruments impose limitations on the use of force and protect civilians and prisoners in time of war. He urged States always to observe "the limitations imposed by international humanitarian law, protecting defenseless peoples and civil structures, especially hospitals, schools, places of worship, refugee camps".²³

Meanwhile, in November we will mark the thirtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which enumerates basic rights like a child's right to life, to his own name and identity, to be raised by his parents within his family environment, to have a relationship with both parents, even if they are separated, and to be protected from abuse or exploitation. The fact that all but one State have ratified the Convention is an

²¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catholic_Church_and_health_care.

²² https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/catholic_hospitals_represent_26_percent_of_worlds_health_facilities_reports_pontifical_council.

²³ Pope Francis, Sunday Angelus, 11 August 2019.

illustration of a multilateral commitment to protect the youth and foster their growth and flourishing.

One particular right that the international community must ensure with greater vigilance is the right to “freedom of thought, conscience and religion,” as enshrined in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In the past year, we have seen an increase of attacks against religious believers. The fact that many of these acts of violence have been perpetrated against believers as they gather to pray in their places of worship make them particularly reprehensible. We appreciate the international community’s calling attention to attacks on religious believers and its adoption of various initiatives to protect churches, mosques, synagogues, temples and other religious sites. These efforts should consider religious sites of every religion and, at the same time, we know that even the best international instruments are not enough. All States need to give greater attention to their responsibility to protect all of their citizens, as well as to address vigorously the cultural factors that lead to violence against believers.

Finally, the challenges of international migration and forced displacement demand the comprehensive commitment and action of all States. The Holy See actively supported and engaged in the intergovernmental consultations and negotiations of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. Although the fruit of compromise, the Global Compact and together that for Refugees are a significant sign of political will, affirming our shared responsibility to act in solidarity not only as governments but also with people on the move. Looking ahead, the International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) will be central to the follow-up and review of the Global Compact. All States, regardless of their political position regarding the Compact, should take advantage of this unique forum to address the emerging challenges and concerns they face in making international migration more safe, orderly and regular.

Refugees and migrants, who so often experience exclusion and suffering in both countries of origin and destination, are deserving of a galvanized multilateralism of assistance and inclusion by the international community. So too are the internally displaced who were left aside by the Global Compacts. Fortunately, a regionally diverse group of Member States, including many affected by internal displacement, have garnered the political will to increase global attention for these persons by requesting the Secretary-General to establish a high-level panel on IDPs. To be effective, the panel must strengthen the capacity of the stakeholders, including IDPs themselves, to respond holistically and coherently to IDP situations.

[Conclusion]

Mr. President,

When Pope Francis spoke about the importance of multilateralism at the beginning of the year, he drew extensively on the thoughts expressed here, in this General Assembly Hall, by his predecessor Pope Paul VI in 1965. As the first Pope to visit the United Nations, Paul VI framed the whole purpose of this institution within the context of multilateralism. “You exist and work,” he said, “to unite nations, to associate States, ... to bring them together with each other. You are an association, a bridge between peoples, a network of relations between States.”²⁴ Then he used an ecclesiastical analogy dear to him and which he intended as a supreme compliment to the United Nations: “We are tempted to say that in a way, this characteristic of yours reflects in the temporal order what our Catholic Church intends to be in the spiritual order: one and universal. ... Your vocation is to bring together not just some peoples but all peoples together as brothers. A difficult undertaking? Without a doubt. But this is the nature of your very noble undertaking.”²⁵

In brief, for the Holy See the underlying principle of multilateralism is human fraternity. In this perspective, the Holy See wishes that as we all look ahead to the 75th anniversary of the United Nations next year, the international community revisit the reason why it exists and commit itself anew to the task of uniting nations, associating States, and bringing peoples together as one family. The Holy See, which has diplomatic relations with 183 countries, and the Catholic Church, which is a communion of peoples of all nations and races, is wholeheartedly dedicated to this challenging, noble and necessary common commitment, common work, and common good.

Thank you, Mr. President.

²⁴ Paul VI. Address at the General Assembly of the United Nations, 4 October 1965.

²⁵ Ibid.