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APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

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MEETING WITH MIGRANTS

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS

Premises of diocesan Caritas (Rabat)

Saturday, 30 March 2019

[Multimedia]

Dear Friends,

I am happy to have this opportunity to meet with you during my visit to the Kingdom of Morocco. It gives me a chance once more to express my closeness to all of you and, together with you, to discuss a great and deep wound that continues to afflict our world at the beginning of this twenty-first century. A wound that cries out to heaven. We do not want our response to be one of indifference and silence (cf. *Ex 3:7*). This is all the more the case today, when we witness many millions of refugees and other forced migrants seeking international protection, to say nothing of the victims of human trafficking and the new forms of enslavement being perpetrated by criminal organizations. No one can be indifferent to this painful situation.

I thank Archbishop Santiago [Agrelo Martínez] for his words of welcome and for the Church's work in assisting migrants. I also thank Jackson for his testimony, and all of you, both migrants and members of associations dedicated to their care. We have met this afternoon to strengthen our ties and to continue our efforts to ensure worthy living conditions for all. And thank you to the children! They are our hope. We need to fight for them. They have the right to life, the right to dignity. Let us fight for them. All of us are called to respond to the many challenges posed by contemporary movements of migration with generosity, enthusiasm, wisdom and farsightedness,

each to the best of his or her ability (cf. *Message for the 2018 World Day of Migrants and Refugees*).

A few months ago, here in Marrakech, the Intergovernmental Conference approved the adoption of the Global Compact for safe, orderly and regular migration. “The migration Compact represents an important step forward for the international community, which now, in the context of the United Nations, has for the first time dealt on a multilateral level with this theme in a document of such importance” (*Address to Members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See*, 7 January 2019).

This Compact helps us to see that “it is not just about migrants” (cf. *Theme of the 2019 World Day of Migrants and Refugees*), as if their lives and experiences were completely unrelated to the rest of society, or their status as persons with rights was somehow “on hold” because of their current situation. “The side of the border on which a migrant stands does not make him or her more or less human”.^[1]

It is also about the face we want to give to our society and about the value of each human life. Many positive steps have been taken in different areas, especially in the developed countries, yet we cannot forget that the progress of our peoples cannot be measured by technological or economic advances alone. It depends above all on our openness to being touched and moved by those who knock at our door. Their faces shatter and debunk all those false idols that can take over and enslave our lives; idols that promise an illusory and momentary happiness blind to the lives and sufferings of others. How arid and inhospitable a city becomes, once it loses the capacity for compassion! A heartless society... a barren mother. You are not the marginalized; you are at the centre of the Church’s heart.

I wanted to suggest four verbs – *accept*, *protect*, *promote* and *integrate* – that can help those who want to help make this covenant more concrete and real, to act prudently rather than remain silent, to assist rather than isolate, to build up rather than abandon.

Dear friends, I would like to reiterate the importance of these four verbs. They form a frame of reference for us all. For we are all involved in this effort – involved in different ways, but all involved – and all of us are needed in the work of building a more dignified, safe and fraternal life. I like to think that the very first volunteer, assistant, rescuer or friend of a migrant is another migrant who knows at first hand the sufferings of the journey. We cannot develop large-scale strategies capable of restoring dignity by adopting a welfare approach alone. That kind of assistance is essential, but insufficient. You who yourselves are migrants should feel called to take the lead and assist in organizing this whole process.

The four verbs that I mentioned can help us find shared strategies to create space for welcoming, protecting, promoting and integrating. Spaces, ultimately, for conferring dignity.

“In view of the current situation, *welcoming* means, above all, offering broader options for migrants and refugees to enter destination countries safely and legally” ([*Message for the 2018 World Day of Migrants and Refugees*](#)). Indeed, expanding regular migration channels is one of the main objectives of the Global Compact. This shared commitment is needed in order to avoid presenting new opportunities to those “merchants of human flesh” who exploit the dreams and needs of migrants. Until this commitment is fully implemented, the emergency of irregular migration has to be met with justice, solidarity and mercy. Forms of collective expulsion, which do not allow for the suitable treatment of individual cases, are unacceptable. On the other hand, special legalization strategies, especially in the case of families and minors, should be encouraged and simplified.

Protecting means defending “the rights and dignity of migrants and refugees, independent of their legal status” (ibid.). In the context of this entire region, protection must first and foremost be ensured along migration routes, which, sadly, are often theatres of violence, exploitation and abuse of all kinds. Here too, it seems necessary to pay particular attention to migrants in situations of great vulnerability: to the many unaccompanied minors and to women. It is essential that everyone be guaranteed the right to the medical, psychological and social assistance needed to restore dignity to those who have lost it along the way, as you who work in this agency are doing with great dedication. Among those present, some can testify personally to the importance of these protection services for providing hope during the time of a stay in host countries.

Promoting means ensuring that everyone, migrants and local residents alike, can enjoy a safe environment in which they can develop all their gifts. This promotion begins with the recognition that no human being is worthy of being discarded, but rather should be seen as a potential source of personal, cultural and professional enrichment in whatever place they find themselves. Host communities will be enriched if they learn how best to appreciate and utilize the contribution made by migrants, while working to forestall all forms of discrimination and xenophobia. Migrants should be encouraged to learn the local language as an essential vehicle of intercultural communication, and helped in positive ways to develop a sense of responsibility towards the society that accepts them, learning to respect individuals and social bonds, laws and culture. This will contribute to the integral human development of all.

But let us not forget that the human promotion of migrants and their families begins also with their communities of origin, where the right to migrate must be guaranteed, but also the right not to be forced to emigrate, that is, the right to enjoy in their native land suitable conditions for a dignified life. I appreciate and encourage programmes of international cooperation and transnational development free of partisan interests, which involve migrants as active protagonists (cf. [*Address to the Participants in the International Forum on Migration and Peace*](#), 21 February 2017).

Integrating means engaging in a process that enhances both the cultural heritage of the welcoming community and that of migrants, thus building an open and intercultural society. We know that it is not easy – for those who arrive and for those who receive them – to encounter a

foreign culture, to put ourselves in the shoes of people quite different from ourselves, to understand their thoughts and their experiences. As a result, we often refuse to encounter the other and raise barriers to defend ourselves (cf. *Homily at the Mass for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees*, 14 January 2018). *Integrating* requires us not to be conditioned by fear and ignorance.

Ahead of us, then, is a journey we must make together, as true travelling companions. It is a journey that engages everyone, migrants and locals, in building cities that are welcoming, respectful of differences and attentive to intercultural processes. Cities that are capable of valuing the richness of the diversity born of our encounter with others. Here too, many of you can personally testify to how essential that commitment is.

Dear migrant friends, the Church is aware of the sufferings that accompany your journey and she suffers with you. In reaching out to you in your very different situations, she is concerned to remind you that God wants us all to live our lives to the full. The Church wants to be at your side to help you achieve the very best for your life. For every human being has the right to life, every person has the right to dream and to find his or her rightful place in our “common home”! Every person has a right to the future.

Once again, I renew my gratitude to all engaged in assisting migrants and refugees throughout the world, and particularly to you, the personnel of Caritas, and to your partner agencies, who have the honour of showing God’s merciful love to so many of our brothers and sisters in the name of the whole Church. You know well from experience that for Christians, “it is not just about migrants”, for it is Christ himself who knocks on our doors.

May the Lord, who during his earthly life experienced in his own flesh the suffering of exile, bless each one of you. May he give you the strength needed never to lose heart and always be for one another a “safe haven” of welcome and acceptance.

Thank you!

[1] *Message of His Majesty King Mohammed VI at the Intergovernmental Conference on the Global Compact for Migration*, Marrakech, 10 December 2018.
