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The Pope writes to the general secretary of the United Nations: lessons in humanity from the victims of war and persecution

Vatican City, 23 May 2016 – The Holy Father has written a letter to the general secretary of the United Nations, Ban Ki-Moon, on the occasion of the First World Humanitarian Summit held in Istanbul, Turkey on 23 and 24 May. The message, published in full below, was read this morning by Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin, representing the Holy See at the Summit. In the text, the Pope urges us to heed the cry of the victims of violence and persecution, and to receive from them a lesson in humanity to change political and economic choices, abandoning behaviour and attitudes of cultural superiority.

"I wish to greet all those taking part in this first World Humanitarian Summit, the President of Turkey together with the organisers of this meeting, and you, Mr Secretary-General, who have called for this occasion to be a turning point for the lives of millions of people who need protection, care and assistance, and who seek a dignified future.

I hope that your efforts may contribute in a real way to alleviating the sufferings of these millions of people, so that the fruits of the Summit may be demonstrated through a sincere solidarity and a true and profound respect for the rights and dignity of those suffering due to conflicts, violence, persecution and natural disasters. In this context, the victims are those who are most vulnerable, those who live in conditions of misery and exploitation.

We cannot deny that many interests today prevent solutions to conflicts, and that military, economic and geopolitical strategies displace persons and peoples and impose the god of money, the god of power. At the same time, humanitarian efforts are frequently conditioned by commercial and ideological constraints.

For this reason, what is needed today is a renewed commitment to protect each person in their daily life and to protect their dignity and human rights, their security and their comprehensive needs. At the same time, it is necessary to preserve freedom and the social and cultural identity of peoples; without this leading to instances of isolation, it should also favour cooperation, dialogue, and especially peace.

'Leaving no one behind' and 'doing one's very best' demand that we do not give up and that we take responsibility for our decisions and actions regarding the victims themselves. First of all, we must do this in a

personal way, and then together, coordinating our strengths and initiatives, with mutual respect for our various skills and areas of expertise, not discriminating but rather welcoming. In other words: there must be no family without a home, no refugee without a welcome, no person without dignity, no wounded person without care, no child without a childhood, no young man or woman without a future, no elderly person without a dignified old age.

May this also be the occasion to recognise the work of those who serve their neighbour and contribute to consoling the sufferings of the victims of war and calamity, of the displaced and refugees, and who care for society, particularly through courageous choices in favour of peace, respect, healing and forgiveness. This is the way in which human lives are saved.

No one loves a concept, no one loves an idea; we love persons. Self-sacrifice, true self-giving, flows from love towards men and women, the children and elderly, peoples and communities... faces, those faces and names which fill our hearts.

Today I offer a challenge to this Summit: let us hear the cry of the victims and those suffering. Let us allow them to teach us a lesson in humanity. Let us change our ways of life, politics, economic choices, behaviour and attitudes of cultural superiority.

Learning from victims and those who suffer, we will be able to build a more humane world.

I assure you my prayers, and I invoke upon all present the divine blessings of wisdom, strength and peace."
