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Letter from the Cardinal Secretary of State to the President of the United Mexican States, President of the Global Platform 2017 for the Reduction of Disaster Risks (Cancún 22-26 May)

Letter from the Cardinal Secretary of State to the President of the United Mexican States, His Excellency Enrique Peña Nieto, president of the Global Platform 2017 for the Reduction of Disaster Risks, taking place in Cancún from 22 to 26 May:

Letter of the Cardinal Secretary of State

Your Excellency,

The international community is becoming increasingly aware of the importance of prevention and resilience. Indeed, the year 2015 saw the adoption of three agreements, three Plans of Action, all profoundly interrelated and significant for the future of humanity: the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change. The year 2017 represents an important step in the process of determining the most concrete and effective means for their implementation.

This process has as one of its major challenges that of integrating activities for disaster risk reduction with initiatives aimed at promoting integral human development, eliminating poverty and social exclusion, mitigating climate change and adapting to it.

In light of the above, I would like to emphasize three areas of particular concern for the specific theme of this meeting: disaster risk reduction.

There is a need, first of all, to reinforce the work of prevention, education and training, in order to reduce the human, material and economic losses caused by natural disasters. These, as we know, are often the result of poor management and aggravated by inadequate planning which fail to take into account the correct order of priorities. Increasing an awareness of the risks posed by natural threats demands careful attention to raising

consciousness of those risks and various possibilities for preventing them. This will also lead to better management in a number of areas. I think, for example, of the management of water (cf. Pope Francis, *Address to a Seminar on the Human Right to Water*, 24 February 2017), a precious resource that is also one of the chief causes of natural disasters. Many educational programs and mechanisms of early warning now exist; used well, these can significantly reduce the loss of human lives due to natural disasters and shape a genuine culture of disaster risk reduction and resilience on the global and local levels. Such a culture would significantly improve efforts to combat poverty and respond to climate change, to say nothing of advancing the acknowledgment of human dignity and the centrality of the human person.

Another area of concern is the urgent need for such processes of consciousness-raising to pay special attention to those who are most vulnerable. Often the poor suffer most from natural disasters, which destabilize less secure economies and societies, and strike already precarious habitats or environments. It is advisable that such persons be involved directly and on various levels in training programs, knowledge sharing and consciousness-raising in the areas of prevention and disaster risk reduction. At the same time, together with the work of prevention, closer attention needs to be paid to our way of responding to the impact of natural disasters, which, needless to say, require material aid, but also human and spiritual assistance. Evaluating the “damage” caused by natural disasters must also take into account “the ‘interior damage’, the suffering of those who have lost their dear ones and have seen the sacrifices of an entire life swept away” (Pope Francis, *Address in Mirandola, Italy*, 2 April 2017). Hence the importance of comprehensive efforts to restore dignified living conditions to those affected by such disasters.

A third area of concern involves the recognition that the victims and those most vulnerable have an essential role to play in these processes of prevention, response and reconstruction. They are the ones who have the greatest interest in long-term plans to avert the risk of natural disasters. The capacity of local communities to mobilize themselves ought never to be underestimated in catastrophic situations. Religious and cultural traditions also play a significant role and represent a source of enrichment for the work of resilience. All this calls for broad participation, cooperation, integration and dialogue among all actors, especially in the local communities, including the indigenous peoples. These concerns are central to this Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, whose aim is to identify and share innovative solutions for an integrated approach at every level, from the local to the international.

A correct implementation of the aforementioned three documents demands a change of mentality and of lifestyle. When we look to the future of humanity, we cannot restrict ourselves to particular technical or sectorial areas. We are dealing with shared values, responsibilities and expressions of solidarity involving the good of the entire human family. As Pope Francis has observed, “when people become self-centered and self-enclosed, their greed increases... So our concern cannot be limited merely to the threat of extreme weather events or great natural disasters, but must also extend to the catastrophic consequences of social unrest. Obsession with a consumerist lifestyle, above all when few people are capable of maintaining it, can only lead to violence and mutual destruction” (Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, 204).

In the name of His Holiness Pope Francis, I express the hope that the work of the Global Platform will prove useful, fruitful and effective for enabling resilience to go hand in hand with the development of a genuine, responsible and fraternal cooperation grounded in the common good. In this regard, the Holy See stands ever ready to make its own specific contribution.

I have the honor to convey to you, and to all taking part in this important gathering, His Holiness’s prayerful good wishes for the fruitfulness of your deliberations and his confidence that they will lead to more determined efforts to meet the challenges before us with ever greater solidarity and shared concern.

Pietro Parolin

Secretary of State

