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Audience with participants in the international Conference “Drugs and addiction: an obstacle to integral human development”

At 11.30 this morning, in the Clementine Hall of the Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the international Conference *Drugs and addiction: an obstacle to integral human development*, promoted by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, currently taking place in the Vatican in the New Synod Hall from 29 November to 1 December 2018.

The following is the Pope’s address to those present at the audience:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am pleased to receive you at the conclusion of this International Congress on Drugs and Addictions. I offer all of you a cordial greeting and I thank Cardinal Turkson for his words of introduction to our meeting.

In these days, you have discussed issues and problems linked to the troubling phenomenon of narcotics and other forms of addiction, old and new, which pose an obstacle to integral human development. Communities everywhere are challenged by current social and cultural changes and by pathologies derived from a secularized climate marked by consumerist capitalism, self-sufficiency, a loss of values, an existential void, and a weakening of bonds and relationships. Drug addiction, as has often been pointed out, is an open wound in our society; its victims, once ensnared, exchange their freedom for enslavement to a dependency that we can define as chemical.

Drug use is gravely harmful to health, human life and society. All of us are called to combat the production, processing and distribution of drugs worldwide. It is the duty and responsibility of governments courageously to undertake this fight against those who deal in death. An area of increasing risk is virtual space; on some Internet sites, young people, and not only the young, are lured into a bondage hard to escape, leading to a loss of life’s

meaning and, at times, even of life itself. Faced with this disturbing scenario, the Church senses the urgent need to create in today's world a form of humanism capable of restoring the human person to the centre of social, economic and cultural life: a humanism grounded in the "Gospel of Mercy". There the disciples of Jesus find the inspiration for a pastoral action that can prove truly effective in alleviating, caring for and healing the immense suffering associated with different kinds of addiction present in our world. In a throwaway society, God discards no one; for him no one is irredeemable!

The Church, together with local, national and international institutions, and various educational agencies, is concretely engaged in every part of the world in combating the spread of addictions, devoting her resources to prevention, care, rehabilitation and reinsertion, in order to restore dignity to those who have lost it. Fighting addictions calls for a combined effort on the part of various local groups and agencies in enacting social programmes promoting health care, family support and especially education. In this regard, I readily support the desire expressed by this Conference for a better coordination of policies aimed at halting the growth of drug abuse and addictions through the creation of networks of solidarity and closeness to those suffering from these pathologies.

Dear brothers and sisters, I express my deep gratitude for your contribution to these days of study and reflection. I encourage all of you, in your various sectors, to pursue your commitment to increasing awareness and offering support to those who have emerged from the tunnel of drug addiction and various addictions. They need our help and accompaniment, so that they in turn will be able to ease the pain of so many our brothers and sisters in difficulty.

I entrust your efforts and your worthy initiatives to the intercession of Our Lady, Health of the Infirm. I ask you, please, to remember me in your prayers. To all of you, and to your families and communities, I cordially impart my blessing.
