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Audience with participants at the Reunion of Aid Agencies for the Oriental Churches

At 11.15 this morning, in the Consistory Hall of the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the Reunion of Aid Agencies for the Oriental Churches, in Rome for the 92nd Plenary Assembly.

The following is the Pope's address to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear friends,

I am pleased to welcome you at the beginning of the work of the 92nd Plenary Assembly of ROACO. I greet Cardinal Leonardo Sandri and thank him for the words he addressed to me, and with him all the staff of the Dicastery and you, members of the Agencies from all over the world gathered with the present and the future of the Eastern Catholic Churches at heart.

Since our last meeting, for me too there have been several occasions to meet entities linked to the work of the Congregation and each of you: I am thinking of my recent apostolic trips to Bulgaria, North Macedonia and Romania, but above all to the great day of prayer and dialogue with my brothers, the Patriarchs of the Middle East, last 7 July in Bari.

In these days, the interventions of the Pontifical Representatives of some Countries, as well as of the Speakers who have been chosen, will help you to listen to the cry of many who in these years have been robbed of hope: I think with sadness, once again, of the drama of Syria and the dense clouds that seem to thicken above it in some areas that are still unstable and where the risk of an even greater humanitarian crisis remains high. Those who have no food, those who do not have medical care, who have no school, orphans, the wounded and widows raise their voices up high. The hearts of men may be insensitive, but that of God is not: wounded by the hatred and violence that can be unleashed among his creatures, always able to be moved and take care of them with

the tenderness and strength of a father who protects and guides. But sometimes I also think of the wrath of God that will be unleashed against the leaders of countries that talk about peace and sell weapons to carry out these wars. This hypocrisy is a sin.

An insistent thought accompanies me thinking of Iraq - where I wish to go next year - that it may look ahead through the peaceful and shared participation in the construction of the common good of all the religious components of society, and that it may not fall into the tensions which come from the never-ending conflicts of regional powers. And I do not forget Ukraine, so that peace may come to its population, whose wounds caused by the conflict we have tried to alleviate with the charitable initiative to which many ecclesial realities have contributed. In the Holy Land, I hope that the recent announcement of a second phase of study of the restoration of the Holy Sepulchre, which sees the Christian communities of the *Statu quo* side by side, will be accompanied by the sincere efforts of all local and international actors for a peaceful coming soon living together in respect of all those who live in that land, a sign to all of the blessing of the Lord.

People fleeing, huddled on ships in search of hope, not knowing which ports they will be able to receive, but in Europe they open the ports to boats that have to load sophisticated and expensive weapons, capable of producing devastation that do not spare even children. This is the hypocrisy of which I spoke. We are aware here that Abel's cry rises up to God, as we remembered in Bari a year ago, praying together for our faithful of the Middle East.

Along with lamentation and weeping, you will hear in these days voices of hope and consolation: they are the echoes of that tireless work of charity that is made possible also through each one of you and the entities you represent. This expresses the face of the Church and contributes to making her alive, in particular nurturing hope for the young generations. Young people have the right to be heard announcing the fascinating and demanding word of Christ and, as we had the opportunity to share during the Assembly of the Synod of Bishops last October, when they meet an authentic and credible witness they are not afraid to follow Him and to question themselves on their vocation. Please continue and increase your effort, so that in the countries and situations you support, young people can grow in humanity, free from ideological colonization, with open hearts and minds, appreciating their national and ecclesial roots and desiring a future of peace and prosperity, which leaves no one behind and discriminates against no-one. This year, the young people of Ethiopia and Eritrea - after the long-awaited peace between the two countries and abandoning their arms – hear the words of the Psalm: "You turned my wailing into dancing" (30,11).

I am sure that young people hear the strong call to that sincere and respectful fraternity of each one, which we recalled with the document signed in Abu Dhabi together with the Great Imam of Al-Ahzar. Help me to make it known and to spread that good alliance for the future of humanity contained in it. And let us all commit ourselves to preserving those realities that have been living the message for years, with particular attention to educational institutions, schools and universities, so precious especially in Lebanon and throughout the Middle East, authentic laboratories of coexistence and workshops of humanity to which all can easily have access.

I thank you for all that you do. I pray for you. And you, please, continue to pray for me. Thank you.
