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Audience with a delegation from the “Simon Wiesenthal Center”

Today the Holy Father Francis received in audience a delegation from the “Simon Wiesenthal Center”, and addressed the following greeting to them:

Greeting of the Holy Father

Dear Friends,

I offer you a cordial welcome. Your Center, active throughout the world, seeks to combat all forms of antisemitism, racism and hatred towards minorities. For decades, you have maintained contacts with the Holy See, in a shared desire to make the world a better place in respect for human dignity. This dignity is due to every person in equal measure, regardless of his or her ethnic origin, religion or social status. It is essential to teach tolerance, mutual understanding and freedom of religion, and the promotion of peace within society.

In a particular way, you help keep alive the memory of the Holocaust. A week from now, 27 January, will mark the seventy-fifth anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. In 2016, I went there to reflect and to pray in silence. In our world, with its whirlwind of activity, we find it hard to pause, to look within and to listen in silence to the plea of suffering humanity. Our consumerist society also squanders words: how many unhelpful words are spoken, how much time is wasted in arguing, accusing, shouting insults, without a real concern for what we say. Silence, on the other hand, helps to keep memory alive. If we lose our memory, we destroy our future. May the anniversary of the unspeakable cruelty that humanity learned of seventy-five years ago serve as a summons to pause, to be still and to remember. We need to do this, lest we become indifferent.

It is troubling to see, in many parts of the world, an increase in selfishness and indifference, lack of concern for others and the attitude that says life is good as long as it is good for me, and when things go wrong, anger and malice are unleashed. This creates a fertile ground for the forms of factionalism and populism we see around us, where hatred quickly springs up. Hatred and the sowing of evil. Even recently, we have witnessed a barbaric

resurgence of cases of antisemitism. Once more I firmly condemn every form of antisemitism. To tackle the cause of the problem, however, we must commit ourselves also to tilling the soil in which hatred grows and sowing peace instead. For it is through integration and seeking to understand others that we more effectively protect ourselves. Hence it is urgent to reintegrate those who are marginalized, to reach out to those far away, to support those ignored for lack of resources or funds, and assist to those who are victims of intolerance and discrimination.

The Declaration *Nostra Aetate* pointed out that Jews and Christians possess a rich spiritual patrimony (cf. no. 4), which needs to be increasingly appreciated and put at the service of others. I feel that we, above all, are summoned, especially today, to such service: not to take the path of distance and exclusion, but that of proximity and inclusion; not to force solutions, but to initiate ways of drawing closer together. If we do not do this – we who believe in Him who from on high remembered us and showed compassion for our weaknesses – then who will? I am reminded of the words of the Book of Exodus: “God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God saw the people of Israel – and God knew their condition” (2:24-25). Let us too remember the past and have compassion on those who suffer, and in this way till the soil of fraternity.

Dear friends, I thank you for your efforts; may we continue to cooperate in the defence of the most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters. May the Almighty help us to respect one another and to love one another more, and to make the earth a better place by sowing seeds of peace. *Shalom!*
