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Message of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue on the occasion of the Buddhist feast of Vesakh/Hanamatsuri 2021

Vesakh is the most important feast for Buddhists: it commemorates the main events in the life of Buddha. The feast of Vesakh/Hanamatsuri 2021 is celebrated on different dates in countries of Buddhist culture, in accordance with the different traditions. This year the feast will be celebrated by the majority of countries of Buddhist tradition on 26 May. For the event, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue has sent the following message to Buddhists:

Buddhists and Christians:

Promoting a Culture of Care and Solidarity

Dear Buddhist Friends,

1. On behalf of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, I am writing to you on the occasion of the feast of Vesakh to offer my heartfelt greetings. It is my prayer that this annual feast of the birth, enlightenment, and passing away of Gautama Buddha may bring joy, serenity, and hope to the hearts of Buddhists throughout the world.
2. The current world situation, tragically marked by the COVID-19 pandemic, challenges the followers of all religions to collaborate in new ways at the service of the human community. In his Encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, signed in Assisi on 3 October 2020, Pope Francis reiterated the urgency of a universal solidarity that allows humanity to overcome together the difficult crises that threaten it, because “no one is saved alone” (Pope Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, 32).
3. The Vesak greetings, of which we celebrated the 25th anniversary last year, have highlighted many of the values we hold in common and the wisdom that supports the collaboration we foster, especially in addressing times as hard as the present one. The suffering caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has made us aware of our

shared vulnerability and interdependence. We are called to discover and practice the solidarity enshrined in our respective religious traditions. As Pope Francis says, “ancient stories, full of symbolism, bear witness to a conviction which we today share, that everything is interconnected, and that genuine care for our own lives and our relationship with nature is inseparable from fraternity, justice and faithfulness to others.” (Pope Francis, *Message for the World Day of Peace*, 1 January 2021).

4. The Buddhist teaching on Brahma Viharas (Four Heavenly Abodes or Virtues) offers us a timeless message of solidarity and active care. In speaking about *mettā* (loving kindness), it exhorts followers to extend boundless love to all. “As a mother even with her life protects her only child, so let one cultivate immeasurable loving-kindness towards all living beings” (*Mettā Sutta*). As the Buddha taught, practitioners are equally encouraged to “make haste in doing good deeds; one should restrain one’s mind from evil; for the mind of one who is slow in doing good tends to take delight in doing evil” (*Dhammapada*, 116).

5. May this dramatic situation of the COVID-19 pandemic strengthen our bonds of friendship and further unite us in service to the human family, adopting “a culture of dialogue as the path, mutual cooperation as the code of conduct; reciprocal understanding as the method and standard” (Pope Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, 285).

6. Dear Buddhist friends, these are the thoughts that I wish to share with you this year. Let us look forward to the future with hope and serenity. Happy Feast!

Miguel Ángel Card. Ayuso Guixot, MCCJ

President

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