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Audience with a Buddhist delegation from Thailand

This morning, the Holy Father Francis received in audience a Buddhist delegation from Thailand, to whom he addressed the following greeting:

Greeting of the Holy Father

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome your Delegation from Thailand composed of thirty-three prominent Buddhist monks of both the Theravada and Mahayana schools, together with sixty lay Buddhists and several representatives of the Thai Catholic Church.

The purpose of your visit has been to commemorate the golden jubilee of the historic meeting of the Most Venerable Somdej Phra Wannarat, the seventeenth Supreme Buddhist Patriarch of Thailand, with the Pope Saint Paul VI, on 5 June 1972. I express my heartfelt gratitude to Supreme Patriarch Somdej Phra Sri Ariyavongsagatanana IX and the Head of Supreme Sangha of Thailand for sending Somdej Phra MahaTheerajarn and the Thai delegation to the Vatican to renew our bonds of friendship and mutual collaboration.

On this occasion, I would like to renew the sentiments expressed by Pope Paul VI when he met the Thai delegation fifty years ago: "We have a profound regard for the spiritual, moral, and socio-cultural treasures that have been bestowed on you through your precious traditions. We recognize the values of which you are the custodians, and we share the desire that they should be preserved and fostered. We hope there will be increasing friendly dialogue and close collaboration between the traditions that you represent and the Catholic Church" (*Insegnamenti*, 1972, X, 604-605).

In the course of these fifty years, we have seen a gradual and steady growth of "friendly dialogue and close collaboration" between our two religious traditions. I recall the visit of the Thai delegation on 16 May 2018 with a translation of an ancient Buddhist manuscript in the Pali language kept in the Vatican Library. I also remember with joy my visit to your beloved country on 20-23 November 2019 and the wonderful welcome and hospitality I

received. I likewise appreciate your friendship and fraternal dialogue with the members of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue, as well as with the Catholic community in Thailand.

At a time when our human family and our Planet are facing manifold threats, such friendly dialogue and close collaboration are all the more necessary. Sadly, on all sides we hear the cry of a wounded humanity and a broken earth. The Buddha and Jesus understood the need to overcome the egoism that gives rise to conflict and violence. The Dhammapada sums up the Buddha's teachings thus: "To avoid evil, to cultivate good, and to cleanse one's mind – this is the teaching of the Buddha" (*Dph* 183). Jesus told his disciples: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another" (*Jn* 13:34). Our task today is to guide our respective followers to a more vivid sense of the truth that we are all brothers and sisters. It follows that we should work together to cultivate compassion and hospitality for all human beings, especially the poor and marginalized.

In this spirit, I encourage your efforts to deepen and broaden your dialogue and cooperation with the Catholic Church. I thank you once again for your courteous gesture in visiting the Vatican to commemorate the memorable meeting between our venerable Predecessors. Trusting that your stay in Rome will be pleasant, I offer my prayerful good wishes for the Conference to take place this afternoon, entitled *Friendship between Buddhists and Christians for a Culture of Encounter*, at the Pontifical Urban University.

Upon you and upon all in your noble country I invoke an abundance of blessings from on high.
