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Audience with participants in the Meeting on Refugees and Migrants organized by the Pontifical Gregorian University

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the International Conference on Refugees and Migrants organized by the Faculty of Social Sciences of the Pontifical Gregorian University, in collaboration with the Refugee and Migrant Education Network (RME), the *Being the Blessing* Foundation, from 26 to 28 September 2022 on the theme “Initiatives in Refugee and Migrant Education. Moving forward – Diving deeper – Together”.

The following is the address delivered by the Pope during the meeting:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters,

I welcome you at the conclusion of your Conference on “Initiatives in Refugee and Migrant Education”. I thank Professor Cernera for his introduction to this meeting.

Your Conference has been planned as a moment of reflection grounded in the needs of our migrant brothers and sisters, with particular attention to children and young people. You have heard their desire to pursue their education even though they have been uprooted from their native lands. I want to encourage you and to emphasize the importance of your contribution in *three areas* pertaining to your competence: the areas of *research*, *teaching* and *social promotion*. For it is not enough simply to welcome migrants, they must be welcomed, accompanied, promoted and integrated. Four steps: welcomed, accompanied, promoted and integrated.

As for *research*, I see the need for further studies on the so-called “right not to emigrate”. It is important to reflect on the causes of migratory movements and on the forms of violence that lead people to depart for other countries. Naturally, I am referring to the conflicts that are ravaging so many regions of our world. At the same

time, though, I would like to point to another kind of violence, namely, the abuse of our common home. The earth has been devastated by the excessive exploitation of its resources and by decades of pollution. As a result, more and more people are forced to leave their lands, which have become uninhabitable. Academia – and Catholic academia in particular – is called to play a primary role in providing answers to ecological problems and challenges. Based on scientific data, you are in a position to help in guiding and informing the decisions of government leaders in support of an effective care for our common home.

As for the area of *teaching*, I express my appreciation for your commitment to establishing educational programmes that benefit refugees. Much has already been accomplished, yet much more remains to be done. In this regard, priority must continue to be given to the most disadvantaged. One effective way of doing this is to offer courses that respond to their needs, the organization of programmes of distance learning, and the provision of scholarships to permit their resettlement. By drawing upon the resources of the international network of academic institutions, universities can also facilitate the recognition of the degrees and professional qualifications of migrants and refugees, for the good of the latter and that of the societies that receive them.

Schools and universities are privileged environments not only for instruction but also for encounter and integration. “We can grow in our common humanity and build together an ever greater sense of togetherness. Openness to one another creates spaces of fruitful exchange between different visions and traditions, and opens minds to new horizons” (*Message for the 2022 World Day of Migrants and Refugees*). In order to respond adequately to the new challenges posed by migration, there is a need to offer specific professional training to the personnel and teachers who work with migrants and refugees. Catholic institutions of higher learning are called to educate their own students, who will be tomorrow’s administrators, entrepreneurs and cultural leaders, to a clearer understanding of the phenomenon of migration, within a perspective of justice, global responsibility and communion in diversity. Opportunities for meaningful encounters are to be promoted, so that teachers and students can have an opportunity to hear the stories of those men and women who are migrants, refugees, displaced persons or victims of trafficking.

In the area of *social promotion*, universities represent an institution that interacts with the social context in which they happen to operate. They can help to identify and indicate the foundations for the construction of an intercultural society, in which ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity is seen as a source of enrichment and not an obstacle for the common future. In addition, universities represent a privileged setting for encouraging young people to engage in volunteer work on behalf of refugees, asylum seekers and the more vulnerable migrants.

On the occasion of the World Day of Migrants and Refugees, celebrated last Sunday, I encouraged everyone to work together *with* migrants to build a better future. Indeed, “history teaches us that the contribution of migrants and refugees has been fundamental to the social and economic growth of our societies. This continues to be true in our own day. Their work, their youth, their enthusiasm and their willingness to sacrifice enrich the communities that receive them. Yet this contribution could be all the greater if it were optimized and supported by carefully developed programmes and initiatives. Enormous potential exists, ready to be harnessed, if only it is given the chance” (*ibid.*).

Dear friends, the work that you are carrying out in these three great areas – research, teaching and social promotion – can be guided by the four words that encapsulate the Church’s efforts on behalf of migrants and refugees: *welcome, protect or accompany, promote and integrate*. Every educational institution is called to be a place of welcome, protection or accompaniment, promotion and integration for all, to the exclusion of none.

I thank you for your work and I encourage you to persevere in your efforts. From the heart, I bless each of you and all your co-workers. And I ask you, please, to pray for me. Thank you.
