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Audience with participants in the Indigenous Peoples' Forum

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the Sixth Global Meeting of the Indigenous Peoples' Forum, organized by the International Fund for Agricultural Development.

The following is the address delivered by the Pope to those attending the audience:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters,

I give thanks for this visit, in the midst of the work of the *Indigenous Peoples' Forum*, which is taking place in these days at the headquarters of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). This year's theme – "Indigenous Peoples' Climatic Leadership: Community-based solutions to enhance resilience and biodiversity" – offers an opportunity to recognize the fundamental role indigenous peoples hold in the protection of the environment, and to highlight their wisdom in finding global solutions to the immense challenges that climate change poses to humanity every day.

Unfortunately, we are witnessing an unprecedented social and environmental crisis. If we truly want to take care of our common home and improve the planet on which we live, it is essential to make profound changes in our lifestyles, it is essential to have models of production and consumption. We should listen more to the indigenous peoples and learn from their way of living, to understand adequately that we cannot continue to devour natural resources avidly, because "the Earth was entrusted to us in order that it be mother for us" – the Mother Earth – "capable of giving to each one what is necessary to live" (*Video Message for the Meeting of 500 national and international representatives: "Expo of Ideas 2015 – toward the Milan Charter"*, 7 February 2015). Therefore, the contribution of indigenous peoples is fundamental in the fight against climate change. And this has been scientifically proven.

Today, more than ever, there are many who demand a process of reconversion of the consolidated structures of power that underpin the societies of western culture; these, at the same time, transform the historical relations marked by colonialism, exclusion and discrimination, giving rise to a renewed dialogue on the way in which we are building the future of the planet. We urgently need joint action, the fruit of sincere and constant collaboration, because the environmental challenge we are experiencing and its human roots have an impact on every one of us. Not only a physical impact, but also psychological and cultural.

Therefore, I ask governments to recognize the indigenous peoples of the world, with their cultures, languages, traditions and spirituality, and to respect their dignity and their rights, in the knowledge that the richness of our great human family consists precisely in its diversity. I will return to this later.

Ignoring indigenous communities in protecting the earth is a grave error – it is extractive functionalism – not to mention a great injustice. On the contrary, valuing their cultural heritage and their ancestral techniques will help to embark on pathways for better environmental management. In this regard, IFAD's work in assisting indigenous communities in a process of autonomous development, primarily through the Indigenous Peoples Support Fund, is commendable, although these efforts must still be multiplied and accompanied by a more resolute and far-sighted decision-making process, in a just transition.

I would like to focus on two key words in this regard: good living or living well, and harmony.

Living well is not “doing sweet nothing”, the “*dolce vita*” of the rarefied bourgeoisie, no, no. It is living in harmony with nature, knowing how to create not equilibrium, no, more than equilibrium, harmony, which is superior to balance. Balance can be functional; harmony is never functional; it is sovereign in itself.

Knowing how to move in harmony: this is what gives the wisdom we call living well. The harmony between a person and his or her community, the harmony between a person and the environment, the harmony between a person and all creation.

The wounds against this harmony are those that we are clearly seeing, which destroy populations: extractivism, in the case of Amazonia, for example, deforestation, or in other places the extractivism of the mining industry.

So we must always strive for harmony. When peoples do not respect the good of the land, the good of the environment, the good of time, the good of vegetation or the good of the fauna, when they do not respect this general good, they lapse into inhumane attitudes, because they lose contact with, I will say the word, Mother Earth. Not in a superstitious sense, but rather in the sense of what culture gives us, and of what this harmony gives us.

Aboriginal cultures are not to be transformed into modern cultures, no. They are there to be respected. And two things: firstly, let them follow their path of development and, secondly, listen to the messages of wisdom they give us. Because it is not an encyclopaedic wisdom. It is the wisdom of seeing, listening to and touching daily life.

Continue to fight to proclaim this harmony, because this functionalist policy, this policy of extractivism, is destroying it. And we can all learn how to live well in the harmonious sense of the indigenous peoples.

Dear brothers and sisters, I accompany you with my closeness and my prayer. God bless you, your families and your communities, and may he enlighten you in the work you are carrying out, for the benefit of all creation.

Thank you.
