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Audience with Refugees who reached Europe through Humanitarian Corridors, and the Representatives of the Communities receiving them

This morning, in the Paul VI Hall, the Holy Father Francis received in audience a group of refugees who have reached Europe through humanitarian corridors, along with their families and representatives of the communities who receive them and assist in their integration.

The following is the address delivered by the Pope to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear friends,

I am pleased to meet this large group of refugees and their families who have come to Italy, France, Belgium and Andorra through *humanitarian corridors*. This initiative is due to the generosity and creativity of the Community of Sant'Egidio, the Federation of Evangelical Churches and the Waldensian Table, the Catholic Church in Italy, particularly Caritas, and its network of hospitality, and the commitment of the Italian government and the other governments who have welcomed you.

The humanitarian corridors were established in 2016 as a response to the increasingly dramatic situation in the Mediterranean. Today, it must be said that this initiative is, tragically, not only most timely but also more necessary than ever, as the recent shipwreck in Cutro sadly attests. That disaster should never have happened, and everything possible needs to be done to ensure that it will not be repeated. Humanitarian corridors build bridges that many children, women, men, and older persons fleeing from unstable and gravely dangerous situations cross in order to arrive safely, legally and with dignity, in their host countries. These corridors cross borders and, more importantly, break down the walls of indifference that have shattered the hopes of so many people who have waited for years in painful and unbearable situations.

Each of you merits attention because of the difficult experiences you have had. I would like to mention in

particular those who have passed through the detention camps in Libya; on many occasions, I have listened to their stories of suffering, humiliation and violence. Humanitarian corridors are a practicable way to avoid the tragedies and dangers associated with human trafficking. Still, much effort is needed to expand this work and to open even more legal migration routes. Where political will is lacking, effective models like yours offer new and viable avenues. For that matter, safe, orderly, regular and sustainable migration is in the interest of all countries. If this is not recognized, there is a risk that fear will erase people's future and justify those barriers against which lives are shattered.

Your work of identifying and welcoming vulnerable people seeks to respond in the most appropriate way to a sign of the times. It points a way forward for Europe, to avoid its remaining frozen, fearful and lacking vision for the future. Indeed, "withdrawing into oneself or into one's culture is never the right way to give new hope" (*Address to the "Roma Tre" University, 17 February 2017*). European history has developed over the centuries through the integration of different peoples and cultures. So we should not be fearful of the future!

Humanitarian corridors not only aim to bring refugees to Italy and other European countries, rescuing them from situations of uncertainty, danger and endless waiting; they also work toward integration, since there is no acceptance without integration. At the same time, your work has taught you that integration is not without its difficulties. Not everyone who arrives is prepared to travel the long road that lies ahead. That is why it is important to expend even greater attention and creativity in enabling those granted the opportunity to come to Europe to understand and appreciate what they will encounter here. Let us not forget that people need to be accompanied constantly, from start to finish. Your role ends only when a person is truly integrated into our society. As Scripture bids us: "The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you" (*Lev 19:34*).

Here I would greet the hundreds of individuals, families, and communities who have with great generosity made themselves available to carry out this praiseworthy work. You have opened your hearts and homes. You have supported the integration process with your resources and you have involved others as well. I thank you most heartily: you represent a beautiful face of Europe, one that is open, not without some sacrifice, to the future.

To the promoters of these "corridors", to the men and women religious, and to the individuals and organizations who participate in this effort, I would like to say this: you are mediators of a history of integration, not intermediaries who profit from the needs and sufferings of others. You are not intermediaries but mediators, and you show that, once serious efforts are made to lay the groundwork, it is possible to welcome and integrate others effectively.

Your work of welcoming is a concrete commitment to peace. A number of Ukrainian refugees are present here; to them I want to say that the Pope does not give up seeking peace, hoping for peace and praying for peace. I do this for your gravely afflicted country and for other countries affected by war; in our midst are many people who have fled from other wars. This service to the poor and to refugees and displaced people is also a powerful experience of Christian unity. In effect, the initiative of humanitarian corridors is ecumenical. It is an impressive sign of unity between brothers and sisters who share their faith in Christ.

I also greet with affection those of you who have already passed through humanitarian corridors and are now living a new life. You have shown a firm resolve to live in freedom from fear and insecurity. You have found friends and supporters who are now a second family for you. You have studied new languages and learned about new societies. This has been difficult, but also enriching. I say this as the son of a family of immigrants who took a similar path. Your good example and industriousness help to dispel fear and apprehension about foreigners. Indeed, your presence can be a blessing to the countries in which you live, and whose laws and culture you have learned to respect. The hospitality you were offered has motivated you to give in return: indeed, some of you are already engaged in serving others in need.

Dear brothers and sisters, in this meeting of ours, where those who welcome and those welcomed come together and intermingle, we can savour the words of the Lord Jesus: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (*Mt 25:35*). Those words point all of us towards the path we must take. A path that needs to be

travelled *together* and *with perseverance*. Thank you for leading the way! Keep moving forward! May the Lord bless you and may the Virgin Mary, Our Lady of the Way, watch over you. I bless you from my heart, and I ask you, please, to pray for me.
