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Audience with directors and employees of the National Institute for Social Security (Istituto Nazionale della Previdenza Sociale – INPS)

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the directors and employees of the National Institute for Social Security (*Istituto Nazionale della Previdenza Sociale – INPS*), on the occasion of the 125th anniversary of its foundation, to whom he delivered the following address:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning, welcome!

I thank the President for his kind words. The National Institute for Social Security is 125 years old, and has an important history. Not all countries in the world can claim such a valuable experience in the service of workers. You, here in Italy, have these riches, which are truly yours. I will mention three of them: the oratories in the parishes – it is something of yours, and does a great deal of good; second, voluntary service: Italian voluntary service is great! Voluntary service everywhere! Third, institutions such as yours, which are organized and last not two, or three years – 125! – that have this ability to keep going. Thank you!

And the theme of social security is always relevant. On the one hand, indeed, society seems to have lost its future horizon: it has settled on the present and what may happen to future generations is of little interest. “I do my part, then, they will get by...”: this will not do. Worrying signs in this regard are the ecological crisis and public debt, a burden that falls on the shoulders of our children and grandchildren. To think that in some countries, your grandchildren – you are not married yet, but your grandchildren will be born with a public debt – terrible! The choice of sustainability, instead, responds to the principle according to which it is unjust to place irreversible and excessively onerous burdens on the young. On the other hand, social security is a form of welfare that keeps the various generations together. A worker’s deserved pension, in fact, is supported not only by his or her years of work, but also by the fact that there is someone who, through their work, is effectively paying for the pension of others. In essence, a strong bond between the generations is the prerequisite for functioning social security. And I see children here, and there comes to mind the expression of an elderly man,

no, a man of almost sixty, who, faced with the Italian demographic winter – the average age in Italy is 46 – faced with this demographic winter, he says: “But who will pay my pension? Who will pay my pension? It won’t be the dogs that people have instead of children...”. Think about it.

It should not be forgotten that foreign workers who do not yet have Italian citizenship also contribute to the pension system. It would be a good sign to be able to express gratitude to them for what they do.

Social security also reminds us that “everything is connected”, everything, and that we are interdependent on one another. Social life is sustained thanks to solidarity-based community networks. The common good passes through the daily work of millions of people who share the principle of the bond of solidarity between workers. Therefore, I would like to make three appeals to preserve a social security up to the challenges of societies that, like Italy’s, are increasingly aging, as I said.

The first appeal is *no to illegal work*. But with this, may there be a culture: no to illegal work. Indeed, at the time it seems to bring economic benefits to the individual, but over time it does not enable families to contribute and to have just access to the pension system. Illegal work distorts the labour market and exposes workers to forms of exploitation and injustice.

The second appeal is *no to abuse of precarious work*, which has an impact on young people’s life choices and as such forces them to work even when their energies fail. Precariousness should be transitory, it cannot be excessively prolonged; otherwise, it ends up leading to mistrust, it promotes the postponement of life choices in the young, it delays their entry into the pension system and it exacerbates the declining birth rate.

The third appeal is a *yes to dignified work*, which is always “free, creative, participatory and mutually supportive” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 192). Social security is a form of participation in one’s own wellbeing and that of others. Setting aside economic resources and guaranteeing access to healthcare are precious assets that can hold together the different seasons of life.

Indeed, we know of good providence and bad providence, which the Bible itself describes very well. *Bad providence* is that of those who think only of themselves, as we are reminded by the Gospel parable of the miser (cf. *Lk 12:16-21*), who has ever-larger storehouses built to contain his goods. Those who accumulate only for themselves end up deluding themselves: “Take your ease, eat”, says the Gospel, “take your ease, eat, drink, be merry” (v. 19), the man says to himself. But the Lord says to him, “Fool! This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” (v.20). Those who close themselves up in false securities have no future.

Good providence, instead, is that of the patriarch Joseph who, having become the governor of Egypt, takes care to set aside the grain from the years of plenty to be able to face better the time of famine. “There was famine in all lands, but in the land of Egypt there was bread”

“There was famine in all lands”, we read in the Book of Genesis, “but in all the land of Egypt there was bread” (41: 54). Joseph not only trusts in God’s providence and recognizes it, but he also shows foresight for the good of the people. He knows how to look ahead; he imagines good even when evil seems to prevail, he takes care of the people entrusted to him. And this is your vocation: taking care of people *in the future*.

We need wise politicians, guided by the criterion of fraternity, and who know how to discern between one season and another, avoiding wasting resources when they exist and leaving future generations in grave difficulty.

Dear brothers and sisters, thank you for your service in support of workers, to guarantee assistance to the unemployed and those who are sick, injured or elderly. I hope that you will continue to make the right to a pension concretely possible, and above all to foster in the fabric of Italian society the culture of the common good, providence and sustainability, which in to be economic must also be social. I entrust you to the protection of Saint Joseph. May the Lord bless you and Our Lady keep you. And please, do not forget to pray for me.

Thank you!
