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Audience with participants in the 14th Annual Meeting of the International Catholic Legislators' Network

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the 14th Annual Meeting of the *International Catholic Legislators' Network*, on the theme: "*Great Power Struggle, Corporate Capture and technocracy: a Christian answer to dehumanizing tendencies*".

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

Address of the Holy Father

Your Eminence,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, welcome!

I am pleased to greet you as you gather for your fourteenth annual meeting in Frascati. I thank you for your visit, and express my gratitude to the President for his thoughtful words.

The theme you have chosen for your meeting this year, *Great Power Struggle, Corporate Capture and Technocracy: A Christian Answer to Dehumanizing Trends*, touches upon vital aspects of our lives. Indeed, today's "dominant technocratic paradigm" raises profound questions about "the place of human beings and of human action in the world" (*Laudato Si'*, 101).

Surely one of the most concerning aspects of this paradigm, with its negative impact upon both human and natural ecology alike, is its subtle seduction of the human spirit, lulling people – and especially the young – into misusing their freedom. We see this when men and women are encouraged to exercise control *over*, instead of

responsible custodianship of material or economic “objects”, the natural resources of our common home, or even one another. Such objectification, which ultimately impacts most negatively on the poorest and most vulnerable in society, can take place directly or indirectly, through daily choices that may seem neutral but “are in reality decisions about the kind of society we want to build” (*Laudato Si'*, 107).

As you seek to respond to this question, and its many associated challenges, by promoting Catholic social teaching – especially the centrality of the God-given value and dignity of every human person – I would like to suggest that the very structure of your organization can offer a helpful frame of reference, for you are an international *network*, and you describe your aim as seeking to “connect in fellowship a new generation of courageous Christian leaders”.

The goal of any network is to “connect” people, to help them realize that they are part of something larger than themselves. Indeed, that is the stated aim of many social media platforms, and certainly much good takes place through these means of communication. Yet, we also need to be vigilant, for sadly many “dehumanizing” trends resulting from technocracy are found on these media, such as the deliberate spread of false information about people – fake news, the promotion of hatred and division – “partisan” propaganda, and the reduction of human relationships to mere algorithms, not to mention a false sense of belonging, especially among young people, that can lead to isolation and loneliness. This misuse of virtual encounter can only be overcome by the culture of authentic encounter, which involves a radical call to respect and to listen to one another, including those with whom we may strongly disagree. Here too your network can offer an example, for you seek to draw people from across the globe to encounter one another in this genuine way.

Yet *networking* is not only about gathering people together; it is also for enabling them to cooperate in reaching a common objective. We can think of the first disciples, called by Jesus to work together in casting their nets for a huge catch (cf. *Lk* 5:1-11); nets which we could describe as tools to be used in a *shared way* for a *common end*.

These two essential aspects – *connecting* people and a *common end* – characterize your work and rightly mirror the nature of the Church herself, the People of God called to live in both *communion* and *mission*. Those “centripetal” and “centrifugal” forces of the Christian life, sustained by the power of the Holy Spirit, inwardly bind people together in fraternal unity and direct them outwards on the shared mission of joyfully proclaiming the Gospel. An authentic Christian network, then, is already an answer to “dehumanizing trends”, for it not only *points* to the liberating truths about human existence, but seeks to *model* them in the exercise of its own activity. Thus, by remaining a genuinely international Catholic network, you will credibly demonstrate an alternative to that technocratic tyranny which lures our brothers and sisters into seizing the raw elements of both nature and human nature, and diminishes their capacity for making decisions or living genuinely free lives (cf. *Laudato Si'*, 108).

I pray that the Holy Spirit will inspire and guide your efforts to form a new generation of well educated and faithful Catholics leaders committed to promoting the Church’s social and ethical teachings in the public sphere. In this way, you will surely contribute to the building up of God’s kingdom.

May the Blessed Virgin Mary watch over you, and may Almighty God bless your efforts and bring them to fruition. Please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you!
