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Message of the Holy Father to participants in the Eighth Migration Festival (25 to 28 October 2023)

The following is the message sent by the Holy Father Francis to the participants in the Eighth Migration Festival taking place from 25 to 28 October 2023, in Modena and other Emilian cities, on the theme “Free to leave, free to stay”:

Message of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters,

I greet you all who are participating in the eighth edition of the Migration Festival, entitled “Free to leave, free to stay”. I warmly congratulate the organizers of this important event, including the *Migrantes* Foundation of the Italian Episcopal Conference.

The theme of the Festival takes up that of the World Day of Migrants and Refugees this year, dedicated to the freedom to choose whether to migrate or to stay. And there is an even clearer reference to the solidarity initiative promoted a few years ago by the Italian Episcopal Conference, which I cite in my Message as a concrete response to the challenges of contemporary migration.

In your work, you intend to reflect on contemporary migratory flows through considerations that go beyond the emergency, in the awareness that we are faced with a multi-faceted, complex, global and long-term problem. Therefore, the responses to today’s migratory challenges cannot but be complex, global and long-term.

You propose to reiterate the centrality of the human person in the planning of policies and migratory programmes, with special attention to the most vulnerable groups, such as women and children. In effect, the principle of the primacy of the human being and his or her inviolable dignity “obliges us to always prioritize personal safety over national security” (*Message for World Day of Migrants and Refugees*, 2018). And again, “Jesus Christ asks us not to yield to the logic of the world, which justifies injustice to others for my own gain or

that of my group. 'Me first, and then the others!'. Instead, the true motto of the Christian is, 'The last shall be first!'" (*Message for World Day of Migrants and Refugees*, 2019).

I encourage you to develop concrete proposals to favour legal and safe migration. Along these lines, "We need to multiply our efforts to combat the criminal networks that exploit the hopes and dreams of migrants. It is likewise necessary to indicate safer routes. This means that efforts must be made to expand regular migration channels" (*Reflection of His Holiness Pope Francis at the Moment of Prayer for Migrants and Refugees*, 19 October 2023).

But at the same time, active efforts must be made to guarantee to everyone the right not to have to migrate. "Migrants flee because of poverty, fear or desperation. Eliminating these causes and thus putting an end to forced migration calls for shared commitment on the part of all, in accordance with the responsibilities of each. This commitment begins with asking what we can do, but also what we need to stop doing. We need to make every effort to halt the arms race, economic colonialism, the plundering of other people's resources and the devastation of our common home" (*Message for World Day of Migrants and Refugees*, 2023).

May the Lord bless your work and, by the intercession of Mary Most Holy, always support your effort to welcome, protect, promote and integrate all the migrants and refugees who knock on our door.

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 23 October 2023

FRANCIS
