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Audience with children from various parts of the world on the occasion of the event “Children meet the Pope”

This afternoon, in the Paul VI Hall, the Holy Father Francis received in audience children from 84 countries throughout the world on the occasion of the event organized by the Dicastery for Culture and Education, “Children meet the Pope”, on the theme: *Let us learn from boys and girls*.

Upon arrival in the hall, the Pope was welcomed by hymns and a greeting from five children, representing the five continents, from Syria, Ukraine, Benin, Guatemala and Australia. The Holy Father then delivered his address and answered questions posed to him by fourteen children of various nationalities.

The following is the text of Pope Francis’ address during the meeting, and his dialogue with the children:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear boys and girls, good afternoon and welcome!

Thank you from the bottom of my heart to all of you for coming, to your chaperones, and to the organizers of this meeting: to Cardinal José Tolentino and the Dicastery for Culture and Education, to Father Enzo Fortunato, to your families, and to all the people and associations who have contributed to giving us the great joy of being here!

The theme of our meeting is “Let Us Learn from Boys and Girls.” This might seem like a strange title to someone: “Learn from children? Aren’t children the ones who need to learn?” Yes, of course, and yet, this is the way it is: we need to learn from you. I am always happy when I meet you because you teach me something new every time. For example, you remind me how beautiful life is in its simplicity, and how beautiful it is to be together! These are two big gifts God has given us: to live and be together. I see this in your lively eyes and smiles, I hear it in your squealing voices, in the songs you have sung, and in the bursts of joy that vibrate throughout this huge hall! These are the cheers we want to fill the world with: not the ones from bombs, but the

ones from your joy and your happy laughter, which remind all of us that life is a very beautiful gift, that God loves us, and that we want to share this joy as brothers and sisters.

This is what we want to tell the world. So let's say it together now. Repeat it with me, loud: "Life is a gift!" [they repeat] "God loves us!" [they repeat] "We are all brothers and sisters!" [they repeat].

In fact, you have come here from all over the world, just like many brothers and sisters who are meeting together in a big house. It's the big house that Jesus has given us, the huge family of the Church, open to all the children of the world. Because that's how it should be: wherever they go, every child in the world must always feel at home, always welcomed with so much love, with a beautiful smile, with a hug, with a caress.

I wish I could welcome all of you one by one. Since there are so many of you, I am addressing all of you together, and through you, all the boys and girls in the whole world, to bring you God's embrace, the Church's embrace, and every good person's embrace, with my embrace. Especially to those children who, as we know, are unfortunately suffering right now from war, from hunger, from disease, from climate disasters, and from poverty. To the children who are in danger because bad people even put weapons in their hands! Children do not need to have weapons in their hands. They need to have toys, books, notebooks, and many other beautiful and good things, but not weapons! And together with you, I would like to say to all the children who are suffering, that they are not alone, that we keep them in our hearts, we pray for them, and we commit ourselves to do everything we can so they can find hope and serenity again soon, and so that smiles can return to their faces. May a smile return to the face of every child on earth!

Dear children, your presence here is a sign that goes straight to the hearts of all us adults. It is the voice of innocence that questions us and makes us think, that forces us to ask ourselves: What are we doing with our world, our planet, our society? What future are we preparing for you?

These are important questions you help us reflect on with your simplicity. With the joy with which you accept everything as a gift, as a present in front of which you open your eyes up wide, you are surprised, and giggle happily. With your desire to communicate, to listen, and to tell. And in this regard, I recommend that you always listen carefully to your parents and grandparents. You know, it's important to listen to grandparents because they have lived a long time and can teach you so many things. And then, ask them a lot of questions, and every day at home, tell them everything that happens to you. Because communicating is really good for all of us! You also help us with your desire to play together, to be together, to share what we have with others. And sometimes you surprise us with your actions, like when you offer a kiss, a hug, a toy, a piece of your snack, a smile. How many things we can learn if we stop a moment to be with you!

So, thank you, dear children! And remember: that life is a stupendous gift, that God loves us so much, and that it's beautiful to be together, to communicate, to share, and to give. Do this all the time! Our Lady will help you. I encourage you to always pray to the Our Lady. She is our Mother. And pray for me too. Thank you.

Presenter

Your friends and peers have prepared for you, and with you, a dialogue with Pope Francis. Let us hear the first question, from Isidora, 9, from Brazil.

Isidora

Hello Pope Francis, I am Isidora, I am nine years old, and I come from Brazil. Do you think that we children can save the Earth?

Pope Francis

Yes. Yes, because you are simple and you understand that destroying the Earth means destroying ourselves. We must safeguard the Earth: do you understand this? If you destroy the Earth, you destroy yourself. Let us all say it together, without shouting: “destroying the Earth means destroying ourselves”. Let’s go! [They repeat]. Once again! [They repeat again]. And, you know, because the Earth gives us everything to live: it gives you oxygen, it gives you water, it gives you grass, it helps you a great deal to live. If we destroy the Earth, we destroy ourselves. All together: whoever destroys the Earth, destroys us. All together: destroying the Earth means destroying ourselves. Thank you!

Presenter

Now there is Rania, 12, from Palestine.

Rania

Dear Pope Francis, I am Rania and I am of Palestinian origin. I would like to ask you: if the third world war begins, will peace never return?

Pope Francis

You have asked a question that also touches your homeland, which is suffering a great deal at the moment. If war breaks out: dear friends, war has already broken out. Listen to this: war has broken out all over the world. Not only in Palestine: it has broken out in the south of Africa, it has broken out in the Congo, it has broken out in Myanmar, it has broken out all over the world. There are hidden wars, in Mozambique... throughout the world. We are experiencing an ugly war, and war takes peace and life away from us. We must think a bit, work for peace. Let us say it together, not too loudly: “Let us work for peace”. Everyone! (They repeat). And this girl, who is called Rania, her homeland is at war and is suffering a lot. Let us do something: in silence, let us greet Rania and all the people of her homeland. And you, let the people of Palestine know that all the children have greeted them. Peace is beautiful. Everyone: “Peace is beautiful” [They repeat]. Thank you, Rania.

Presenter

Massimo, 10, Rome.

Hello, Pope Francis. I am Massimo, and I am Italian. I would like to ask you: what do you dream about at night?

Pope Francis

Repeat the question, so everyone can hear.

Presenter

What do you dream about at night?

Pope Francis

You ask me the question: what do you dream about at night? But I don't know what I am dreaming, because I am asleep! It is like that! Sometimes, I have a dream that is a memory of when I was young, or was a child, and I remember these things in dreams. But mostly I sleep. And dreaming is beautiful, it is beautiful. When one dreams something, there is something of life within. Let us say it together: "Dreaming is beautiful". All together! [They repeat]. Thank you.

Presenter

Ivan, 9, from Ukraine.

Ivan

Hello, Pope, I am Ivan and I am Ukrainian. But can you explain to us how to make peace?

Pope Francis

It is a very difficult question, this one. How can we make peace? Come, come here. It is not easy to say how peace is made. It is easier to say how war is made, because war is made with hatred, with revenge, hurting others, and this comes from instinct. But peace, how is it made? Let us think a minute about the question, which is very intelligent. His country is at war, and knows how much we need peace. I will ask the question: let us think and then see how to answer. How do we make peace? Let us think in silence. [A moment of silence]. Have you thought about how peace is made? [They answer: Yes!]. There is not a method for learning how to make peace, no. There is a gesture: peace is made with an outstretched hand, offering the hand of friendship, always trying to involve other people to go together. The outstretched hand. I ask you: do you want to make peace? [They answer: Yes!]. Let us make a gesture, everyone together. Hands outstretched, all together, you too, all together. With the hand outstretched, this is how peace is made: greeting friends, receiving everyone at home. Peace is made with the heart and the hand outstretched. Let us say it together: "Peace is made with the heart and the hand outstretched". All together! [They repeat]. Good. Good boy.

Presenter

Now there is Kim Ngan, 11, from Vietnam.

Dear Pope, I am Kim Ngan, I am eleven, and I come from Vietnam. I want to understand this: if they haven't listened to you, who know many things, why should they listen to us, and how can they do it?

Pope Francis

Come, come, stay here. Kim Ngan comes from Vietnam, and asks me how people can listen to children. People are very worried about many things, many things, and they forget to listen to children. But you must say things as you see them, tell the truth, say what you feel because your voice is necessary. Let us say it all together: "the voice of children is necessary". Everyone! The voice of children is necessary. And you must help adults to listen to you, so adults listen to you, and then make yourselves heard by adults because you are messengers of peace. Let us say it together: "Children are messengers of peace". Together! [They repeat]. Good. Thank you.

Presenter

Antrànik, from Syria.

Antrànik

Hello, Pope Francis, I am Antrànik, and I am from Syria. In your opinion, why do they kill children during wars, and no-one defends them?

Pope Francis

Why do they kill children during wars? I have seen in the war reports, in the news, how many children have died. They are innocent, and this shows the wickedness of war. Because if they only killed soldiers, it would be something else; but they kill innocent people, they kill children. Why do they kill children, in war? That is cruelty. Now I will make a proposal to you, to accompany Antrànik. Why do they kill children in war? Let us have a short moment of silence, all of us, and think of the many children killed in the war. It is ugly, it is an injustice. Let us think about the children killed. [moment of silence] Why do they kill children, during war, and nobody defends them? This shows the cruelty of war: war is always cruel and who "pays for the party"? The children. The innocent are killed. Let us pray together to the Lord for the children: "Our Father who art in heaven...". Why do they kill children in war? Let us pray for the children who suffer and are killed in the war. And thank you, good.

Presenter

And now Celeste, 9 years old, from Peru.

Celeste

Dear Pope, my name is Celeste, I am Peruvian and I wanted to know who your friends are.

Pope Francis

He asks me who my friends are. My friends are the people who live with me at home, they are friends; then I have many friends outside, in some parishes, even some Cardinals are my friends... They are friends. I have the grace of having friends, and this is a grace from God, because the person who has no friends is a sad person. You have understood? The person who has no friends is a sad person. Let's say it together: "A person with no friends is a sad person". Let's try to have: always have friends. And I thank you for the question: you are a good Peruvian.

Presenter

Now we have seven more questions for the Holy Father. Let's start with Pauline, from Congo, 12 years old.

Pauline

Dear Pope, I am Pauline, I come from Congo, which you know well. I wanted to ask you, what is the most important thing you have experienced in your life?

Pope Francis

He asks me what the most important thing in my life is. I could not say, because I have had so many important things in my life... Also, I tell you the truth, this meeting with you is important in my life, because I meet you, your desires... But it is always good to think about the happiest moments we have had in life, and leave the bad ones aside, because we have all had bad ones. No, the happy moments. Now, a little silence, and each of us think about what moment was the happiest in our lives. Let us think in silence. Bye! Go on.

Presenter

Now we have Sofia, 9 years old, from the Philippines.

Sofia

Hi, I'm Sofia and I'm from the Philippines. But when you get angry, how do you calm down?

Pope Francis

Eh, sometimes I get angry. But I don't bite, I don't bite. How do we calm down? Once, a person who helped me a lot in life, when I was a child, told me: "When you are angry, before answering, drink a glass of water". It is good advice: shall we say it together? "When you are angry, drink a glass of water before responding". Another time: [they repeat] Because you know that when someone is angry, he does not speak: he bites. And that is not nice. We leave anger to the dogs, but we try to be gentle and not let ourselves get caught up in anger. Let us repeat one more time: when you are angry, drink a glass of water. Thank you.

Presenter

Now we have Luxelle, 9 years old, from Africa.

Luxelle

Hello, Pope Francis, I am Luxelle. Why is it so hot even though it's autumn?

Pope Francis

This question is very important. She asks: why is the weather so hot, even though it is autumn? She asks this. Do you know why? Because we, the people, do not protect creation, we do not protect nature and nature rebels. We must learn to protect creation, to protect nature and not to spoil nature. Together: "Protect nature". Together! [They repeat]. But, I can't hear you... [They repeat louder]. Another time! [They repeat]. Because nature is our future. Thank you.

Presenter

Now we have Susai, from Samoa and Tonga.

Susai

Hello Pope Francis, my name is Susai and I come from Samoa and Tonga. I would like to ask you: are you worried about the environment?

Pope Francis

You come from Samoa. She asks me if I am concerned about nature.

I am very concerned, because nature is being ruined. Think that, at the North Pole, the ice has now melted and it is possible to navigate. Think that, at the South Pole, a mass of 200 square kilometres of ice has fallen because the Earth is heating up. Think that the seas are rising and they are entering the Earth; think that the fish in the

sea are ruined because we through so many things in the sea. This is why I am concerned about nature. We should all be concerned about nature, and we must help. For example: if you are at a river or on the beach and you drink a Coca-Cola, do you throw the bottle in the river or in the sea? Do you do this? [They answer: "No!"]. We must protect nature, we must protect creation, because nature contains us, and not ruin it. I am concerned about nature, and you too should be concerned about nature. Thank you very much for being concerned about nature. Thank you!

Presenter

Now we have young Chris, 8, from Haiti.

Chris

Good morning, Pope Francis. My name is Chris and I come from Haiti. Given that adults, with their behaviour, are leaving us a polluted world, from whom can we children learn how to respect our planet?

Pope Francis

Bonjour! We must learn to protect the planet, learn from teachers, professors, and also from people who know how to think, from parents, from the family. Protecting creation, because by protecting creation, we protect ourselves, who are a part of creation. Please, do everything – as children – to protect creation. Let us say it together: "Protect creation! Together!" [They repeat]. Again!]They repeat]. Thank you.

Presenter

Now we have Drew, 11, from Australia.

Drew

Hello Pope Francis. My name is Drew, and I come from Australia. I was wondering, how do you pass the time during the day?

Pope Francis

What do I do during the day? I work! And there is a lot of work here. I work by listening to people, putting things in order, thinking how to go forward, making things better. I work: I get up early, I pray and I work. Work is a good thing because – I will tell you something – is someone who does not work, a person who is used to not working, a good person? Yes or no? [They answer: "No!"]. No. Working is healthy. Let us say it together! [They repeat]. We must learn to work always: work gives you dignity. God's commandment is "earn bread with your

work”, earn a living, work. Work gives you dignity. All together: “Work gives you dignity”. I can’t hear... [They repeat more loudly]. Thank you, good.

Presenter

Now we have little Salma, 7, from Ghana.

Hello Pope Francis, I am Salma and I am from Ghana, and can I ask you a question? How can we avoid people wasting so many things?

Pope Francis

She has asked an intelligent question; she asked: how can we avoid people wasting so many things? Please, do not waste, do not waste food, because there are people who do not eat; always use the food, do not throw it away: food is a grace from God. Every one of us must learn not to waste food. Let us say it together: “Do not waste food”. All together! [They repeat]. And if at midday a bit of food is left over, eat it in the evening, but do not throw it away: throwing away food is an ugly sin. Thank you. Good.

We have talked about many beautiful things, but the most beautiful thing that touches your heart is peace, because you do not want war, you want there to be peace in the world. Now, all together, let us make a sign of peace, and giving each other our hand, let us greet each other. Like this, let us greet each other by giving our hand as a sign of peace.

[Hymn, while everyone exchanges a handshake].

Now, all together, let us pray a little; let us pray in silence, and I will give you the blessing. We will receive the blessing in silence. Let us pray to Our Lady: “Hail Mary...”.

And now, in silence, let us receive the blessing, and each one of you, think of your family, think of those whom you want this blessing to reach. May Almighty God, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit bless you.
