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Audience with participants in the First Colloquium between the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the First Colloquium between the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions.

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

Address of the Holy Father

Mr. President of the Senate,

Your Eminence,

Your Excellencies,

Distinguished Authorities of Kazakhstan,

Brothers and sisters,

I welcome all of you on the occasion of your Colloquium, which brings together the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue and, on the Kazakh side, the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, the Senate of the Republic and the Nursultan Nazarbayev Centre for Interfaith and Intercivilization Dialogue. I am pleased to see in this event a first important fruit of the Memorandum of Understanding concluded between the Nazarbayev Centre and the Dicastery.

This meeting is an opportunity for me to recall the Seventh Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, in which I took part when I travelled to Astana. The Congress is a unique and well-tested platform for dialogue not only among religious leaders, but also with the world of politics, culture and the media. It is a praiseworthy initiative that fits well with Kazakhstan's vocation to be a *land of encounter*.

In addition to my Apostolic Journey, I was able to express my closeness to the Kazakh people when the President of the Republic, who had so graciously welcomed me to the Nation, visited the Vatican last January, and also in my meeting with His Excellency Mr. Ashimbayev, President of the Senate and Head of the Congressional Secretariat, who is participating in your Colloquium as head of the Kazakh delegation.

We need to support each other in fostering harmony between religions, ethnic groups and cultures, a harmony of which your great country can be proud. In particular, I want to emphasize three aspects of your work: *respect for diversity*, *commitment to our "common home"* and the *promotion of peace*.

With regard to respect for diversity, which is an indispensable element in democracy and must constantly be promoted, the fact that your State is "secular" contributes greatly to harmony. To be sure, we are speaking of a healthy secularity, which does not confuse religion and politics, but distinguishes them for the good of both and which recognizes at the same time the essential role of religions in society, in service to the common good. Furthermore, peace and social harmony are fostered in your model by fair and equitable treatment of different ethnic, religious and cultural components with regard to employment, access to public services and participation in the political and social life of the Nation, so that no one feels discriminated against or favoured because of his or her specific identity.

Concerning the second point – commitment to the preservation of creation – I would stress the importance of the theme you have chosen: *Our Common Home: a Divine Gift to be Loved and Cared for*. Among your working documents, in addition to *Laudato Si'* and *Laudate Deum*, you have taken into account the *2023-2033 Development Concept*, commissioned by the President of the Republic, which offers a panoramic view of the Congress and its activities in the decade to come, with special attention to environmental issues. This is important: indeed, respect for creation is an indispensable consequence of love for the Creator, for our brothers and sisters with whom we share life on this planet, and in a particular way for future generations, to whom we are called to hand on a legacy to be cherished, not an ecological debt to be paid. It is my hope that your initiative will be an important contribution in this regard.

Finally, your meeting has a third aspect: the *promotion of peace*. Nowadays, many, too many, speak of war: bellicose rhetoric has sadly come back into fashion. This is terrible! Yet while words of hatred multiply, people are dying in brutal conflicts. We need instead to speak of peace, to dream of peace, to give creativity and substance to hopes for peace, for these are the real hopes of individuals and of peoples. Every effort should be made to do so, in dialogue with everyone. May your meeting, marked by respect for differences and with the aim of mutual enrichment, be an example of not seeing the other person as a threat, but as a gift and a valued partner for reciprocal growth.

Dear friends, it is my hope that you make the most of these days of fraternity, rich with friendship and promising plans for the future, and fruitfully share the results of your work. Upon all of you, I invoke the blessing of the Almighty, the God of peace. Thank you!
