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Audience with the Italian Red Cross

This morning, in the Paul VI Hall, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the volunteers of the Italian Red Cross on the occasion of the 160th anniversary of its founding.

The following is the Pope's address to those present at the meeting:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

I am pleased to meet you on the occasion of the 160th anniversary of the founding of the Italian Red Cross. Indeed, it was on 15 June 1864 that the Committee of the Italian Association for the relief of the injured and sick in war was instituted in Milan. Faced with the devastation and sufferings caused by the war – today too, let us not forget this – faced with the devastation and sufferings caused by the war, there was an outpouring of humanity that translated into concrete gestures and works of aid and care, without distinction on the basis of nationality, social class, religion or political opinion. This current of love never stopped: today, as in the past, yours is an effective and precious presence, especially in all those contexts where the clamour of weapons stifles the cry of peoples, their yearning for peace and their desire for the future.

Today is a special occasion to express gratitude to you for the service you provide in contexts of war, and for the help you offer every day to those who are in need in various situations of emergency. Thank you, thank you very much for this!

Your commitment, inspired by the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary work, unity and universality, is also a visible sign that fraternity is possible. If the person is placed at the centre, it is possible to engage in dialogue, to work together for the common good, going beyond divisions, tearing down the walls of enmity, overcoming the logic of interest and power that blind us and turn others into enemies. For the believer, every person is sacred. Every human creature is loved by God and, for this reason, a holder of

inalienable rights. Inspired by this conviction, many people of good will meet, recognizing the supreme value of life and hence the need to defend especially the most vulnerable. On this issue of the most vulnerable, I would like to say one thing to you: they are the children. Many children have arrived here in Italy from the war in Ukraine; do you know something? That these children do not smile, they have forgotten how to smile... That is bad for a child, think about it...

In thanking you for your irreplaceable service in conflict zones and areas afflicted by natural disasters, in the field of training and health, as well as what you do in aid of migrants, the least and the most vulnerable, I want to encourage you to continue in this great work of charity that embraces Italy and the world. May the Red Cross always remain an eloquent symbol of a love for our brothers and sisters that has no borders, be they geographical, cultural, social, economic or religious. It is no coincidence that the slogan you have chosen to celebrate your 160th anniversary is "Everywhere and for Everyone". It is something universal. It is an expression that, while describing a commitment, also describes a style, a way of being and of being there.

Everywhere, because no context can claim to be free of suffering, free of the wounds of the body and the soul, whether in small communities or in the most forgotten corners of the earth. There is a need to globalize solidarity – to globalize solidarity - by working at national and international level, so that "recognizing that all people are our brothers and sisters, and seeking forms of social friendship that include everyone, is not merely utopian", it is reality... "It demands a decisive commitment to devising effective means to this end. ... This entails working for a social and political order whose soul is social charity" (*Fratelli tutti*, 180). For this, we need laws that guarantee human rights everywhere, practices that nurture the culture of encounter, and people capable of looking at the world with a broad perspective. Looking towards the horizon... everyone there...

Everywhere and *for everyone*, because ours is a society of "I" rather than "we", of the small group rather than of all. It is a society that is selfish in this regard. The word "everyone" reminds us that every person has his or her dignity, and deserves our attention: we cannot turn away or reject them because of their conditions, disability, origin or social status. Therefore, I urge you to continue to stand beside our brothers and sisters in need, with competence, generosity and dedication, especially at a time when racism and contempt are growing like weeds. Indeed, "only by cultivating this way of relating to one another will we make possible a social friendship that excludes no one and a fraternity that is open to all" (*ivi*, 94).

This slogan – "Everywhere and for everyone" – recalls the phrase we read in the Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians: "I have become all things to all men" (9:22), says Saint Paul. The Apostle thus summarizes his mission: to reach everyone to bring the joy of the Gospel to all. This is the style that you too achieve every time that, with a fraternal spirit, you intervene at least to alleviate suffering.

In this Easter time, let us ask for the grace to be instruments of fraternity and peace, leaders in charity and builders of a fraternal and solidarity-based world. May the Lord bless you, volunteers and workers, and may He bless your families. I pray for you, and you too, please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you!
