

**ADDRESS OF MOST REVEREND CHRISTOPHE PIERRE,
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES
WORLD SUMMIT IN DEFENSE OF PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS
MAYFLOWER HOTEL, WASHINGTON, DC
MAY 10, 2017**

I am pleased to be with you at this World Summit in Defense of Persecuted Christians. I thank Dr. Viktor Hamm, Vice President of Crusade Ministries, for his kind invitation. As the personal representative of His Holiness Pope Francis to the United States, I wish to begin by conveying a message from Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican Secretary of State, on behalf of the Holy Father:

His Holiness Pope Francis sends warm greetings and assurance of his prayerful closeness to all taking part in the World Summit in Defense of Persecuted Christians. It is his hope that this significant international meeting will draw much-needed attention to the sufferings of so many of our brothers and sisters persecuted solely for their faith in Christ and forced to abandon their homes, their communities and their age-old places of worship. Their fidelity to the Gospel, often at their cost of their lives, represents an outstanding form of ecumenism and a summons to all Christ's followers to unite in prayer and practical solidarity on their behalf. Pope Francis willingly joins the participants in the Summit in praying that the witness of these modern martyrs, and their dramatic sharing in the mystery of the Cross, will bear rich fruit for the conversion of hearts, the spread of the Kingdom and the growth of reconciliation, justice, and peace in the lands torn apart by violence and discord. Upon all assembled for the Summit the Holy Father invokes joy and peace in the Risen Lord.

*Cardinal Pietro Parolin
Secretary of State*

This summit and our dialogue, I pray, will be an instrument of peace. Many here know the plight of persecuted Christians through personal contact with those who suffer – innocent victims of senseless violence, especially women and children. The conflict in Syria, which has worsened in these last months, ought to remind each person of what is happening to Christians throughout the world. Nevertheless, the mission of witnessing faithfully to Christ continues, as a recent ecumenical document pointed out:

“Mission belongs to the very being of the church. Proclaiming the word of God and witnessing to the world is essential for every Christian. At the same time, it is necessary to do so according to gospel principles, with full respect and love for all human beings” (CHRISTIAN WITNESS IN A MULTI-RELIGIOUS CONTEXT: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONDUCT, JOINT STATEMENT OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, AND THE WORLD EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE, 2011, PREAMBLE).

These principles include loving our enemies and persecutors. In imitation of Jesus, Christians must set a good example by loving their enemies and even interceding for them. Referring to those who brought about His death, Jesus said, “*Father, forgive them. They do not*

know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). Giving every disciple an example of how to act in the face of persecution, Stephen, the proto-martyr, cried out in a loud voice, "*Lord, do not hold this sin against them*" (Acts 7:60).

Witnessing to the Lord in the world implies enduring sufferings with joy. It is true that our brothers and sisters are persecuted; some spill their blood and others endure daily persecution from ideologies, from unjust political and economic systems, and from routine discrimination in the workplace. The Holy Father believes "that the cause of all persecution is hatred – the hatred of the prince of this world toward those who have been saved and redeemed by Jesus through his death and Resurrection" (POPE FRANCIS, HOMILY AT MASS IN MEMORY OF THE MARTYRS OF THE 20TH AND 21ST CENTURY, CHURCH OF SAINT BARTHOLOMEW ON THE TIBER ISLAND, 22 APRIL 2017).

The Apostles themselves experienced this hatred, as Acts (5:40-42) recalls: "*When they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they had been found worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name. And every day in the temple and at home they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.*"

In the midst of persecution, the joyful message must still go forth. In writing to Pope Tawadros of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Egypt, Pope Francis said:

"If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together" (1 Cor 12:26). This is a law of the Christian life, and in this sense we can say that there is also an ecumenism of suffering; just as the blood of the martyrs was a seed of strength and fertility for the Church, so too the sharing of daily sufferings can become an effective instrument of unity" (POPE FRANCIS, MESSAGE TO POPE TAWADROS II, 10 MAY 2013).

Indeed, God can bring good even from the most dire situations. Countering the "hatred of the worldly spirit", the Spirit of God is leading Christians, through their sufferings, to greater unity and solidarity. The Holy Father is convinced that the "ecumenism of suffering and of the martyrdom of blood are a powerful summons to walk the long path of reconciliation between the Churches, by courageously and decisively abandoning ourselves to the working of the Holy Spirit" (cf. POPE FRANCIS, ADDRESS TO PATRIARCH KAREKIN II, 14 MAY 2014).

The witness of Christians suffering persecution throughout the world – some to the point of shedding their blood – has become a shared experience "which is deeper and stronger than the differences which still separate our Churches and Ecclesial Communities. The *communio martyrum* is the greatest sign of our journeying together" (cf. POPE FRANCIS, MESSAGE ON THE OCCASION OF THE GLOBAL CHRISTIAN FORUM, 2-4 NOVEMBER 2015).

For our part, each person must commit himself or herself to showing solidarity with our persecuted brothers and sisters – those who spill their blood *and* those who "in the name of some badly interpreted principle of tolerance" are prevented from "freely expressing and practicing their own religious convictions in a peaceful and legitimate way" (cf. ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE OF THE CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN CHURCHES, 7 MAY 2015).

His Holiness reminds us that: "Peace triumphs through solidarity. It generates the desire for dialogue and cooperation which finds an essential instrument in diplomacy" (ADDRESS OF HIS

HOLINESS TO THE MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS ACCREDITED TO THE HOLY SEE, 9 JANUARY 2017).

Beyond drawing attention to the plight of persecuted Christians, as many at this Summit have done, it is necessary to take constructive steps for peace. To that end, earlier this year, as Archbishop Paul Gallagher, Secretary for Relations with States of the Holy See, recently highlighted, Pope Francis appealed to the international community “to make every effort to encourage serious negotiations for an end to conflict, which is causing a genuine human catastrophe. Each of the parties must give priority to international humanitarian law, and guarantee the protection of civilians and needed humanitarian aid for the populace” (INTERVENTION OF THE SECRETARY FOR RELATIONS WITH STATES AT THE CONFERENCE OF BRUSSELS ON SYRIA, 4-5 APRIL 2017).

In his *World Day of Peace Message*, the Holy Father provided a strategy for Christians – namely, making Non-violence a style for Peace. There he noted that the proposed strategy for peace-building given by Jesus is the Beatitudes. This is the challenge Pope Francis offers to political and religious leaders, to heads of international institutions and business and media executives: to apply the Beatitudes in the exercise of their responsibilities. In this way, they will act truly as peacemakers. To this end, the Holy Father pledges the assistance of the Church “in every effort to build peace through active and creative nonviolence” (POPE FRANCIS, WORLD DAY OF PEACE MESSAGE: *NONVIOLENCE: A STYLE OF POLITICS FOR PEACE*, 8 DECEMBER 2016).

There are no easy solutions to relieving the sufferings of persecuted Christians around the world, particularly in Syria and the Middle East. However, I encourage each person here to continue to raise his or her prophetic voice in calling for a cessation of violence, in standing in solidarity with our brothers and sisters and in actively building peace through non-violence. I conclude with the consoling words of Jesus: “*Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are you, when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely utter every kind of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven...*” (Matthew 5:9-12)

Thank you.