



(Vatican City, September 29, 2016).- Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to members of catholic organizations servin in Iraq, Syria and neighbouring territories.

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I thank you for your participation during this moment of common reflection on the Church's work in the context of the Syrian and Iraqi crisis. I greet all of you, Bishops, priests, religious and lay faithful. In particular, I wish to greet Mr Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy to Syria of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, whom I thank for his presence. I express my grateful appreciation to Monsignor Dal Toso and the Pontifical Council *Cor Unum* for the attentive and effective support for what the Church is doing to alleviate the suffering of the millions of victims of these conflicts. In this respect, I would like to stress the importance of renewed cooperation at all levels between the different actors working in this sector.

We must note with great sadness that since our last meeting a year ago, despite extensive efforts made in a variety of areas, the logic of arms and oppression, hidden interests and violence continues to wreak devastation on these countries and that, even now, we have not been able to put an end to the exasperating suffering and repeated violations of human rights. The dramatic consequences of the crisis are already visible well beyond the borders of the region. This is seen in the grave phenomenon of migration.

Violence begets violence, and we have the impression of being caught up in a spiral of arrogance and inertia from which there is no escape. This evil which grips our will and conscience should challenge us. Why, even at the cost of untold damage to persons, property and the environment, does man continue to pursue abuses of power, revenge and violence? We think of the recent attack on a United Nations humanitarian convoy... This is the experience of the *mysterium iniquitatis*, that evil which is present in man and in history and

which needs to be redeemed. Destruction for destruction's sake. And so, during this Year, in which we fix our gaze more intensely on Christ, on Mercy incarnate who has conquered sin and death, I am reminded of the words of Saint John Paul II: "The limit imposed upon evil, of which man is both perpetrator and victim, is ultimately the Divine Mercy" (*Memory and Identity*). It is the only limit. Yes, the answer to the drama of evil lies in the mystery of Christ.

Seeing the many suffering faces in Syria, in Iraq and in the neighbouring and distant countries where millions of refugees are forced to seek shelter and protection, the Church beholds the face of her Lord in his Passion.

The work of all who like you, represent so many workers in the field, who are committed to helping refugees and to safeguarding their dignity, is certainly a reflection of God's mercy and, as such, a sign that evil has limits and does not have the last word. This is a sign of great hope, for which I wish to thank you, and also the many unnamed people - though not nameless to God - who, especially in this Jubilee Year, are praying and interceding in silence for the victims of conflicts, particularly for children and the weak, and who in this way are also supporting your work. In Aleppo, children have to drink polluted water!

Beyond the necessary humanitarian aid, what our brothers and sisters in Syria and Iraq want more than anything else today is peace. And so I will never tire of asking the international community for greater and renewed efforts to achieve peace throughout the Middle East, and of asking not to look the other way.

Putting an end to the conflict is also in the hands of men and women: each of us can and must become a peacemaker, because every situation of violence and injustice is a wound to the body of the whole human family.

This request is my daily prayer to God, to inspire the minds and hearts of all who have political responsibility, that they may be able to renounce their own interests in order to achieve the greater good: peace.

In this regard, our meeting gives me the opportunity to thank and encourage international organizations, in particular the United Nations, for their work of support and mediation among various governments, so that there can be agreement which ends conflict and finally gives priority to the good of defenceless populations. It is a path we must travel together with patience and perseverance, but also with urgency, and the Church will certainly continue to make her contribution.

Finally, my thoughts turn to the Christian communities of the Middle East who suffer the consequences of violence and look to the future with fear. In the midst of so much darkness, these Churches hold high the lamp of faith, hope and charity. As they courageously and without discrimination assist all who suffer and work for a peaceful coexistence, Christians in the Middle East today are a clear sign of God's mercy. They have the admiration, recognition and support of the universal Church.

I entrust these communities and those who work at the service of victims of this crisis to the intercession of Saint Teresa of Calcutta, exemplar of charity and mercy.

May the Lord bless you and our Blessed Mother keep you. And thank you, many thanks for what you do. Many thanks!