The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO COLOMBIA
(6-11 SEPTEMBER 2017)

MEETING WITH AUTHORITIES, THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS AND REPRESENTATIVES OF CIVIL SOCIETY

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

"Casa de Nariño" Presidential Palace's Parade Square "Plaza de Armas" (Bogotá)
Thursday, 7 September 2017

[Multimedia]

Mr President,
Members of the Government and of the Diplomatic Corps,
Distinguished Authorities,
Representatives of Civil Society,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I offer my cordial greetings to Your Excellency Juan Manuel Santos, the President of Columbia, and I thank you for your kind invitation to visit this nation at a particularly important moment in its history; I greet the members of the Government of the Republic and of the Diplomatic Corps. And through you, the Representatives of civil society, I extend my warm wishes to all the people of Colombia, as I begin my Apostolic Visit.

I come to Columbia following in the footsteps of my predecessors, Blessed Paul VI and Saint John Paul II. Like them, I am moved by the desire to share with my Colombian brothers and sisters the gift of faith, which put down its roots so strongly in these lands, and the hope which beats in the hearts of everyone. Only in this way, by means of faith and hope, can we overcome the numerous difficulties encountered along the way, to build a country that is a motherland and a home to all

Colombians.

Colombia is a nation blessed in so many ways; its bountiful nature not only inspires admiration for its beauty, but also requires careful respect for its biodiversity. Colombia ranks second in the world in terms of biodiversity; travelling through this land one can taste and see how good the Lord has been (cf. *Ps* 33:9) in bestowing such immense variety of flora and fauna in the rainforests, the Páramos, the Chocó region, the *farallones* of Cali and mountain ranges like the Macarena, and in so many other places. Equally vibrant is the culture of this nation. But above all, Colombia is rich in the human value of its people, men and women with a welcoming and generous heart, courageous and determined in the face of obstacles.

This meeting allows me to express my appreciation for all the efforts undertaken over the last decades to end armed violence and to seek out paths of reconciliation. Over the past year significant progress has been made; the steps taken give rise to hope, in the conviction that seeking peace is an open-ended endeavour, a task which does not relent, which demands the commitment of everyone. It is an endeavour challenging us not to weaken our efforts to build the unity of the nation. Despite obstacles, differences and varying perspectives on the way to achieve peaceful coexistence, this task summons us to persevere in the struggle to promote a "culture of encounter". This requires us to place at the centre of all political, social and economic activity the human person, who enjoys the highest dignity, and respect for the common good. May this determination help us flee from the temptation to vengeance and the satisfaction of short-term partisan interests. We recently heard the words being sung: "Following the path takes its time". This is long-term. The more demanding the path that leads to peace and understanding, the greater must be our efforts to acknowledge each another, to heal wounds, to build bridges, to strengthen relationships and support one another (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 67).

The motto of this country is: "Freedom and Order". These two words contain a complete lesson. Citizens must be valued according to their freedom and be protected by a stable order. It is not the law of the most powerful, but rather the power of the law, approved by all, that regulates a peaceful coexistence. Just laws are needed, which can ensure harmony and which can help overcome the conflicts that have torn apart this nation for decades; laws are required which are not born from the pragmatic need to order society but rather arise from the desire to resolve the structural causes of poverty that lead to exclusion and violence. Only in this way can there be healing of the sickness that brings fragility and lack of dignity to society, leaving it always vulnerable to new crises. Let us not forget that inequality is the root of social ills (cf. ibid. 202).

In this perspective, I encourage you to look to all those who today are excluded and marginalised by society, those who have no value in the eyes of the majority, who are held back, cast aside. Everyone is needed in the work of creating and shaping society. This is not achieved simply with those of "pure blood", but by all. And here lies the greatness and beauty of a country, where all fit in and where all are important. Just like these boys who, through their spontaneity, wanted to

make this ceremonial event much more human. All are important. Real wealth is diversity. I think of the first voyage of Saint Peter Claver from Cartagena to Bogotá, going up the Magdalena: his amazement is ours too. Then and now, we observe the variety of ethnic groups and the inhabitants of the remotest regions, the *campesinos*. Our gaze fixes upon the weakest, the oppressed and maltreated, those who have no voice, either because it has been taken from them, or was never given to them, or because they are ignored. Let us stop to recognize women, their contribution, their talent, their being "mothers" in their great number of tasks. Colombia needs the participation of all so as to face the future with hope.

The Church, faithful to her mission, is committed to peace, justice and the good of all. She is conscious that the principles of the Gospel are a significant dimension of the social fabric of Colombia, and thus can contribute greatly to the growth of the country; particularly, sacrosanct respect for human life, above all for the weakest and most defenceless, is a cornerstone in the formation of a society free from violence. We cannot fail, moreover, to emphasize the social importance of the family, envisioned by God to be the fruit of spousal love, that place "where we learn to live with others despite our differences and to belong to one another" (ibid. 66). I ask you, please, to listen to the poor, to those who suffer. Look them in the eye and let yourselves be continually questioned by their faces racked with pain and by their pleading hands. From them we learn true lessons about life, humanity and dignity. For they, who cry out from their shackles, really understand the words of the one who died on the cross, as expressed by the words of your national anthem.

Ladies and Gentlemen, you have before you a fine and noble mission, which is also a difficult task. May the aspiration of the great Colombian patriot, Gabriel García Márquez, resound in the heart of each citizen: "In spite of this, before oppression, plundering and abandonment, we respond with life. Neither floods nor plagues, famines nor cataclysms, nor even the unending wars down the centuries, have been able to subdue the tenacious advantage of life over death. An advantage which is both increasing and accelerating". What is thus made possible, continues the author, is "a new and sweeping utopia of life, where no one will be able to decide for others how they die, where love will prove true and happiness made possible, and where the races condemned to one hundred years of solitude will, at last and forever, have a second opportunity on earth" (Gabriel García Márquez, *Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech*, 1982).

There has been too much hatred and vengeance… The solitude of always being at loggerheads has been familiar for decades, and its smell has lingered for a hundred years; we do not want any type of violence whatsoever to restrict or destroy one more life. I have wanted to come here to tell you that you are not alone, that there are many of us who accompany you in taking this step; this visit intends to offer you an incentive, a contribution that in some way paves the path to reconciliation and peace.

You are in my prayers. I pray for you, for Columbia's present and future.

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