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Audience with a delegation of the Pan-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations

This morning, the Holy Father Francis received in audience a delegation of the Pan-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations.

After handing out the address prepared for the occasion, the Pope delivered an impromptu greeting to the participants.

The following is the address prepared by the Holy Father for the occasion and handed to those present, and his impromptu greeting:

Address prepared by the Holy Father

Dear brothers, good morning!

I welcome you and thank the Bishop Marcos for the words he addressed to me on your behalf. I give thanks to God that this meeting with you enables me somehow to have closer contact with the Ukrainian people, who have always been present in my prayers in these months. Indeed, you represent the Churches and religious organizations of Ukraine, including the Biblical Society, which is interdenominational. And you participate in the life of the country, endeavouring to respond to social challenges with public interventions and various activities, which in recent times have necessarily been linked to the dramatic current situation.

I want to tell you that I am with you in your proximity to and support for families, children, the elderly, the sick, and most vulnerable people. I am with you in defending the rights of the faithful of every religious community, especially those who suffer abuse and persecution. I am with you in your commitment to assisting prisoners and those who are detained for political reasons. I encourage your efforts to re-establish respect, on the part of everyone, for the principles and norms of international law and fundamental human rights.

And I consider the fact that you decide and carry out all these initiatives *together*, as brothers, to be a grace of God. This is concrete witness of peace in a country that suffers due to war. Your action, carried out with tenacity and courage, prepares effectively for tomorrow, a tomorrow of peace, in which the economic and political interests that engender war will finally give way to the common good of peoples. I pray for this every day. I pray with you and for you, dear brothers, for your people, for the beloved Ukrainian people. May God bless them with the gift of peace!

Impromptu greeting of the Holy Father

I would like to listen to you, but we are slaves to the limitations of time, because at five to nine I have to begin the General Audience. I would like to listen to each one of you, but you can see the number, we cannot do it. So I ask you, please, to be brief, so that at five to nine I can be there. I am sorry, I would stay all morning with you but we are slaves also to time.

[Words in Ukrainian, and translator]

What you hold in your hands is a text that brings together what has stirred in my heart in these months of war, seeing the images of this immense tragedy. I am close to you and I regularly receive envoys from President Zelensky. I am in dialogue with the representatives of the Ukrainian people and this enables me to feel I am with you, and to pray. I thank you for your unity: this, for me, is something great, like the children of a family – one here, another there, another over there, but when the mother is sick, they all come together. It is not so much about Jewish Ukraine, Christian Ukraine, Orthodox Ukraine, Catholic Ukraine, Islamic Ukraine..., no, it is about Ukraine, “mother” Ukraine, and all together! And this shows the fabric of your race. It is an example in the face of the superficiality seen in our culture today.

I had prepared an address but time cuts us short, and so, if you are not offended, I will hand it to you for it to be distributed. I am close to you. Since he was a child – he knows the story – a priest, Father Stefano, he had been there and I learned to serve Mass in Ukrainian, when I was eleven years old, and from that moment my warmth towards Ukraine grew. It is an old warmth that has grown and this brings me closer to you. Have no doubt, I pray for you! I hold you in my heart and ask God to have pity on this courageous populace. Thank you for this visit, thank you! I would like to greet you before leaving, one by one. Only, before we finish, I would ask you to pray, in silence, each person in his or her own way, in your own way, in silence but together for Mother Ukraine.
