



One Page – EXTRA

Pontifical Letter to G-20: “Responsibility for the poor and marginalized must be an essential element of any political decision.”

Vatican City, 11 November 2014: The Holy Father has sent a message to Tony Abbott, prime minister of Australia, who will chair the Summit of Heads of State and Government of the 20 countries (G-20) scheduled to take place on 15 and 16 November in Brisbane. The agenda of the meeting will focus on efforts to relaunch sustained and sustainable growth of the world economy and the fundamental imperative, which emerged from the preparatory work, of creating dignified and stable employment for all. Extensive extracts from the text are published below.

“I would ask the G-20 Heads of State and Government not to forget that many lives are at stake behind these political and technical discussions, and it would indeed be regrettable if such discussions were to remain purely on the level of declarations of principle. Throughout the worlds, the G-20 countries included, there are far too many women and men suffering from severe malnutrition, a rise in the number of unemployed, an extremely high percentage of young people without work and an increase in social exclusion which can lead to criminal activity and even the recruitment of terrorists. In addition, there are constant assaults on the natural environment, the result of unbridled consumerism, and this will have serious consequences for the world economy.

It is my hope that a substantial and productive consensus can be achieved regarding the agenda items. I likewise hope that the assessment of the results of this consensus will not be restricted to global indices but will take into account as well real improvements in the living conditions of poorer families and the reduction of all forms of unacceptable inequality. I express these hopes in light of the post-2015 Development Agenda to be approved by the current session of the United Nations Assembly, which ought to include the vital issues of decent work for all and climate change.

The G-20 Summits, which began with the financial crisis of 2008, have taken place against the terrible backdrop of military conflicts, and this has resulted in disagreements between the Group’s members. It is a reason for gratitude that those disagreements have not prevented genuine dialogue within the G-20, with regard both to the specific agenda items and to global security and peace. But more is required. These conflicts leave deep scars and result in unbearable humanitarian situations around the world. I take this opportunity to ask the G-20 Member States to be examples of generosity and solidarity in meeting the many needs of the victims of these conflicts, and especially of refugees.

The situation in the Middle East has revived debate about the responsibility of the international community to protect individuals and peoples from extreme attacks on human rights and a total disregard for humanitarian law. The international community, and in particular the G-20 Member States, should also give thought to the need to protect citizens of all countries from forms of aggression that are less evident but equally real and serious. I am referring specifically to abuses in the financial system such as those transactions that led to the 2008 crisis, and more generally, to speculation lacking political or judicial constraints and the mentality that maximization of profits is the final criterion for all economic activity. A mindset in which individuals are ultimately discarded will never achieve peace or justice. Responsibility for the poor and the marginalized much therefore be an essential element of any political decision, whether on the national or international level.”

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