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Message of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue to Hindus on the occasion of the feast of Deepavali 2024, 24.10.2024

The feast of Diwali is celebrated by all Hindus and is also known as Deepavali or “row of oil lamps”. Symbolically based on ancient mythology, it represents the victory of truth over falsehood, of light over darkness, of life over death, of good over evil.

The actual celebration lasts three days, marking the beginning of a new year, family reconciliation, especially between brothers and sisters, and worship of God. This year the festival will be celebrated by many Hindus on 1 November.

On this occasion, the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue has sent them a message on the theme: “Hindus and Christians: Promoting harmony amidst diversity and despite differences”.

The following is the full text of the message:

Message

Hindus and Christians:

Promoting harmony amidst diversity and despite differences

Dear Friends,

The Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue sends you its most joyful and prayerful greetings as you celebrate Deepavali, the festival of lights, on 31 October this year. May God, the source of light, fill your minds and hearts with peace and joy, and your families and communities with grace and happiness!

More than ever our cities and countries are increasingly becoming diverse. People of different cultures, religions, ethnicities, languages and ideologies live side by side, either by choice or chance, in almost every part of the globe. This diversity is viewed by most as a great source of mutual growth, learning and enrichment. At the same time, it is also rejected in some parts of the world because it is seen as a potential threat to harmony, even leading to conflict. Concerned as we are over this matter, we would like to share with you some thoughts on how both Christians and Hindus can promote harmony amidst diversity and despite differences.

Throughout history human beings have always experienced difficulties living in harmony. Indeed, this has been the case whenever there is diversity and differences among peoples, resulting sometimes in displays of both hostile and subtle resistance. Nevertheless, as Pope Francis said, "In the dynamics of history, and in the diversity of ethnic groups, societies and cultures, we see the seeds of a vocation to form a community composed of brothers and sisters who accept and care for one another" (Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*, 96, 3 October 2020). Diversity, therefore, invites efforts to build harmony. Moreover, seeds of harmony can be sowed and harvested only through "respect for diversity by offering opportunities for advancement and social integration to all" (Ibid. 220).

In the divine project, diversity and differences are not meant to be a threat to anyone's existence but a gift for harmonious coexistence. They are relational mosaics of a pluriform edifice in which humans of all colours, creeds and cultures can live together. Moreover, they display our common humanity in pluriform expressions. They enrich us and respect diversity.

Unfortunately, the divine vision of fostering harmony through God's own power, in and through diversity is supplanted by ideologies that favour exclusion, discrimination and conformity on both the individual and collective level. Religious fundamentalism, extremism, fanaticism, racism and hyper nationalism in different parts of the world are some examples of ideologies that destroy harmony and give rise to suspicion, prejudice, mistrust, hatred and fear among people, thereby impeding them from forging bonds that sustain human fraternity and social friendship.

There is a need more than ever to rediscover the divine plan for humanity and nurture in our communities, cities and countries the spirit of fraternity that binds everyone together as God's children and as brothers and sisters. As a result, we will be able to build bridges and defeat all forms of moral, economic and social distress and disharmony (cf. Pope Francis, Address, *Meeting with the Authorities, Civil Society and the Diplomatic Corps*, Jakarta, 4 September 2024).

Sowing the seeds of harmony amidst diversity and despite differences is a practical necessity that calls for concrete action and collective effort from all individuals, families, educational institutions, media, communities and nations. All need to work towards breaking down stereotypes, fostering empathy, sensitivity and respect for those who are different from us. We also need to promote dialogue at all levels for a greater awareness, understanding and appreciation of the richness of diversity and differences. With the immense potential religions have to create conducive conditions for harmony in society, all religious leaders have the sacred duty to encourage their followers to strive for harmony.

As believers grounded in our own respective religious traditions and as persons with shared commitment to strengthening harmonious coexistence in society, may we, Christians and Hindus, join hands with the people of other religious traditions and with people of good will, do all that we can to promote harmony amidst diversity and despite differences "with a sense of responsibility and in a spirit of fraternity and inclusiveness" (Pope Francis, *Meeting with Authorities, Civil Society and the Diplomatic Corps*, Singapore, 12 September 2024).

We wish you once again a joyful celebration of Deepavali!

Cardinal Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, MCCJ

Prefect

Msgr. Indunil Janakaratne Kodithuwakku Kankanamalage

Secretary

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