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PHILIPPINES – Manila – 16.01.2015
Presidential Palace
Meeting with the Authorities and the Diplomatic Corps

Original text

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank you, Mr President, for your kind welcome and for your words of greeting in the name of the authorities and people of the Philippines, and the distinguished members of the Diplomatic Corps. I am most grateful for your invitation to visit the Philippines. My visit is above all pastoral. It comes as the Church in this country is preparing to celebrate the fifth centenary of the first proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ on these shores. The Christian message has had an immense influence on Filipino culture. It is my hope that this important anniversary will point to its continuing fruitfulness and its potential to inspire a society worthy of the goodness, dignity and aspirations of the Filipino people.

In a particular way, this visit is meant to express my closeness to our brothers and sisters who endured the suffering, loss and devastation caused by Typhoon Yolanda. Together with many people throughout the world, I have admired the heroic strength, faith and resilience demonstrated by so many Filipinos in the face of this natural disaster, and so many others. Those virtues, rooted not least in the hope and solidarity instilled by Christian faith, gave rise to an outpouring of goodness and generosity, especially on the part of so many of the young. In that moment of national crisis, countless people came to the aid of their neighbors in need. At great sacrifice, they gave of their time and resources, creating networks of mutual help and working for the common good.

This example of solidarity in the work of rebuilding teaches us an important lesson. Like a family, every society draws on its deepest resources in order to face new challenges. Today the Philippines, together with many other countries in Asia, faces the challenge of building on solid foundations a modern society – a society respectful of authentic human values, protective of our God-given human dignity and rights, and ready to confront new and complex political and ethical questions. As many voices in your nation have pointed out, it is now, more than ever, necessary that political leaders be outstanding for honesty, integrity and commitment to the common good. In this way they will help preserve the rich human and natural resources with which God has blessed this country. Thus will they be able to marshall the moral resources needed to face the demands of the present, and to pass on to coming generations a society of authentic justice, solidarity and peace.

Essential to the attainment of these national goals is the moral imperative of ensuring social justice and respect for human dignity. The great biblical tradition enjoins on all peoples the duty to hear the voice of the poor. It bids us break the bonds of injustice and oppression which give rise to glaring, and indeed scandalous, social inequalities. Reforming the social structures which perpetuate poverty and the exclusion of the poor first requires a conversion of mind and heart. The Bishops of the Philippines have asked that this year be set aside as the “Year of the Poor”. I hope that this prophetic summons will challenge everyone, at all levels of society, to reject every form of corruption which diverts resources from the poor, and to make concerted efforts to ensure the inclusion of every man and woman and child in the life of the community.

A fundamental role in the renewal of society is played, of course, by the family and especially by young people. A highlight of my visit will be my meetings with families and with young people here in Manila. Families have an indispensable mission in society. It is in the family that children are trained in sound values, high ideals and genuine concern for others. But like all God's gifts, the family can also be disfigured and destroyed. It needs our support. We know how difficult it is for our democracies today to preserve and defend such basic human values as respect for the inviolable dignity of each human person, respect for the rights of conscience and religious freedom, and respect for the inalienable right to life, beginning with that of the unborn and extending to that of the elderly and infirm. For this reason, families and local communities must be encouraged and assisted in their efforts to transmit to our young the values and the vision which can help bring about a culture of integrity – one which honors goodness, truthfulness, fidelity and solidarity as the firm foundation and the moral glue which holds society together.

Mr President, distinguished authorities, dear friends:

As I begin my visit to this country, I cannot fail to mention the Philippines' important role in fostering understanding and cooperation among the countries of Asia. I would also mention the oft-neglected yet real contribution of Filipinos of the diaspora to the life and welfare of the societies in which they live. It is precisely in the light of the rich cultural and religious heritage of which your country is proud that I leave you with a challenge and a word of prayerful encouragement. May the deepest spiritual values of the Filipino people continue to find expression in your efforts to provide your fellow citizens with an integral human development. In this way, each person will be able to fulfill his or her potential, and thus contribute wisely and well to the future of this country. I am confident that the praiseworthy efforts to promote dialogue and cooperation between the followers of the different religions will prove fruitful in the pursuit of this noble goal. In a particular way, I express my trust that the progress made in bringing peace to the south of the country will result in just solutions in accord with the nation's founding principles and respectful of the inalienable rights of all, including the indigenous peoples and religious minorities.

Upon all of you, and upon all the men, women and children of this beloved nation, I cordially invoke God's abundant blessings.
