

Statement of Warm Welcome on Pope Francis' Visit to Mongolia

The International Board of Pax Christi and the members of Pax Christi Asia Pacific warmly welcome His Holiness Pope Francis during his visit to Mongolia on August 31 to September 4. This historic visit symbolises the spirit of unity, peace, and compassion that the Pope embodies in Northeast Asia, a region where there is a critical need for peace and reconciliation, particularly on the Korean region. Lasting peace is an aspiration shared by all nations and people in the region, and we firmly believe that dialogue, understanding, and cooperation are the pillars upon which a harmonious future can be built.

Mongolia occupies a key strategic position between China and Russia, geographically and in other ways. While blessed with natural resources attracting strong interest from investors, its people face serious challenges from, *inter alia*, climate change, ecological degradation, internal issues including inequality, economic and political turbulence from external factors. Even though the Catholic Church in Mongolia is a small minority of about 1,500 members, it is part of the Mongolian people who deeply respect diverse belief systems and prioritise harmony with nature. This makes Mongolia an ideal place for the Pope to restate his message of human dignity, intercultural understanding and solidarity, care of creation and peace.

The Northeast region has grappled with a multifaceted range of challenges to peace that have not spared Mongolia. These arise from territorial disputes and lingering historical and transitional justice issues, rooted in colonial legacies. An escalating arms race, including nuclear armament, has been spurred by the absence of a shared security framework in the region. Moreover, transboundary environmental concerns, exemplified by the continued reliance on nuclear energy and the issue of Fukushima nuclear wastewater, further compound this intricate landscape.

The messages conveyed by the Pope during his past visits to the region, such as his presence in South Korea for Asian Youth Day in 2014, as well as his visits to Nagasaki and Hiroshima in Japan in 2019, have not only inspired Catholics but have resonated with all individuals who hold a deep commitment to peace. In particular, his unequivocal statements during his visits to Nagasaki and Hiroshima in November 2019, such as "possessing or deploying nuclear weapons is immoral", provided strong support for the peace movement, especially the campaign against nuclear weapons.

As anticipation builds, we propose the following actions by Pope Francis to foster peace and reconciliation in Northeast Asia:

- ***Offer encouragement and solidarity to the people of Mongolia*** as they engage through their leadership and institutions in the years ahead with ensuring justice and peace for all in their country.

- ***Call upon political leaders to actively participate in sincere diplomatic dialogues*** aimed at diminishing the escalating military tensions and imminent threats, which encompass the arms race and the proliferation of nuclear armament. Diplomatic dialogues should actively contribute to the creation of a comprehensive common security framework which will serve as the cornerstone for nurturing enduring and lasting peace within the region.
- ***Strongly advocate for nuclear disarmament***, with a particular focus on achieving comprehensive denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. This objective can be advanced through active endorsement and ratification of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). Furthermore, it can also be advanced through propelling the development of the Northeast Asia Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone (NEANWFZ) taking inspiration from the commendable precedent set by Mongolia, which successfully established its own Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone in 1992.
- ***Promote interfaith dialogue among religious leaders and communities in the region***, facilitating the transcendence of differences and the nurturing of greater harmony through their shared principles of compassion and understanding. This dialogue can encompass discussions on pressing issues like climate change and ecological challenges, which can serve as a unifying platform for peacebuilding among people and their relationship with the nature.
- ***Empower the youth to take an active role in Christ's peace mission*** by engaging in various peace-building endeavours. These efforts may encompass conflict resolution, non-violent dialogue, and comprehensive peace education. Anticipating the forthcoming 2027 World Youth Day in Seoul, Korea, we perceive this event as a golden opportunity to invigorate the commitment of youths to the cause of peace, both in the region and on a global scale.

Our unwavering belief is that through a shared ethos of empathy, respect, and collaboration, we can establish a more just, equitable and peaceful Northeast Asia and extend these values beyond its borders.

We wish to express our profound gratitude to His Holiness Pope Francis for this auspicious occasion and are resolute in our conviction that his visit will ignite inspiration within all of us to ardently strive for a world emancipated from violence, including the scourge of nuclear weaponry.

May peace and harmony reign in Mongolia, the wider Northeast Asia and beyond!

Brussels, August 22, 2023