

**REMARKS OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE  
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC LEGISLATORS NETWORK  
RECEPTION IN HONOR OF INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM  
UNITED STATES CAPITOL BUILDING, WASHINGTON, DC  
TUESDAY, MAY 8, 2018**

As the Apostolic Nuncio, the representative of the Holy Father to the United States, I want to express His Holiness' warm greetings, spiritual closeness and paternal affection for all gathered here. In a special way, I wish to thank Jacqueline Halbig von Schleppenbach, Executive Director of the International Catholic Legislators Network, for her kind invitation. I am grateful for the presence of so many members of Congress, the administration and civil leaders, and am particular grateful for the presence of His Excellency Sam Brownback, U.S. Ambassador for International Religious Freedom at Large, and Jan Figel, the European Union's Special Envoy for the Promotion of Religion or Belief outside the European Union.

One reason we are here this evening is our awareness of the value of religious freedom and our acknowledgment that international religious freedom is threatened on many fronts. In the West, "in the name of some badly interpreted principle of tolerance", many people are prevented from "freely expressing and practicing their own religious convictions in a peaceful and legitimate way" (CF. ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE OF THE CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN CHURCHES, 7 MAY 2015). In other parts of the world, people are deprived of their religious freedom in a bloody and violent manner. I think immediately of the Christian community in the Middle East or the religious minorities in Myanmar and Bangladesh who have been forced to flee their homes because of their religion.

We gather in solidarity with those who are persecuted for their faith. Pope Francis reminds us that: "Peace triumphs through solidarity. It generates the desire for dialogue and cooperation which finds an essential instrument in diplomacy" (ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS TO THE MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS ACCREDITED TO THE HOLY SEE, 9 JANUARY 2017).

What is at stake in the defense of religious liberty is more than the right to worship God. During his Apostolic Voyage to the United States, Pope Francis stated that: "Religious liberty, by its very nature transcends places of worship and the private sphere of individuals and families. Because religion itself, the religious dimension, is not a subculture; it is part of the culture of every people and nation." (POPE FRANCIS, MEETING FOR RELIGIOUS LIBERTY WITH THE HISPANIC COMMUNITY AND OTHER IMMIGRANTS, 26 SEPTEMBER 2015)

The right to religious liberty is a fundamental human right, which shapes the way we interact with each other – even with those who hold different religious beliefs. This right pertains to human dignity and is acknowledged by the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. It is a freedom engraved on the human heart, by which a person may pursue the truth, according to his or her conscience.

Religious freedom allows for an authentic dialogue between people of diverse faiths in the promotion of the common good and peace. It is a reminder of the need to acknowledge the other – our neighbor – and the Other, namely God, who gives each person dignity and freedom and who has revealed Himself in diverse ways.

The different religious traditions can serve as true instruments of peace, because they call individuals and communities to worship God, who is the source of life, liberty, and happiness. Attempts to deny religious expression breed resentment and threaten peace. Pope Francis has stated:

“A healthy pluralism, one which genuinely respects differences and values them as such, does not entail privatizing religions in an attempt to reduce them to the quiet obscurity of the individual’s conscience or relegate them to the enclosed precincts of churches, synagogues or mosques. That would represent, in effect, a new form of discrimination and authoritarianism. The respect due to the agnostic or non-believing minority should not be arbitrarily imposed in a way that silences the convictions of the believing majority or ignores the wealth of religious traditions. In the long run, this would feed resentment rather than tolerance and peace.”  
(POPE FRANCIS, APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION, *EVANGELII GAUDIUM*, 255)

Defending religious freedom protects and promotes the peace we all desire. This task is never-ending and requires constant effort to ensure not only that members of religious groups can worship freely and can transmit their religious heritage to their children, but also that religious values may be a true force for peace, justice and human dignity in the culture.

I thank you for your role in promoting peace and I pray that this gathering will help us discover new ways in which we can creatively and sensitively be artisans for peace through solidarity, dialogue, and diplomacy.