Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the Workshop Organized by the PAS entitled “The Human Right To Water”

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good afternoon!

I greet all of you and I thank you for taking part in this meeting concerned with the human right to water and the need for suitable public policies in this regard. It is significant that you have gathered to pool your knowledge and resources in order to respond to this urgent need of today’s men and women.

The Book of Genesis tells us that water was there in the beginning (cf. *Gen* 1:2); in the words of Saint Francis of Assisi, it is “useful, chaste and humble” (cf. *Canticle of the Creatures*). The questions that you are discussing are not marginal, but basic and pressing. Basic, because where there is water there is life, making it possible for societies to arise and advance. Pressing, because our common home needs to be protected. Yet it must also be realized that not all water is life-giving, but only water that is safe and of good quality.

All people have a right to safe drinking water. This is a *basic human right* and a central issue in today’s world (cf. *Laudato Si’*, 30; *Caritas in Veritate*, 27). This is a problem that affects everyone and is a source of great suffering in our common home. It also cries out for practical solutions capable of surmounting the selfish concerns that prevent everyone from exercising this fundamental right. Water needs to be given the central place it deserves in the framework of public policy. Our right *to* water is also a duty *regarding* water. Our right to water gives rise to an

inseparable duty. We are obliged to proclaim this essential human right and to defend it — as we have done — but we also need to work concretely to bring about political and juridical commitments in this regard. Every state is called to implement, also through juridical instruments, the Resolutions approved by the United Nations General Assembly since 2010 concerning the human right to a secure supply of drinking water. Similarly, non-state actors are required to assume their own responsibilities with respect to this right.

The right to water is *essential* for the survival of persons (cf. *Laudato Si'*, 30) and decisive for the future of humanity. High priority needs to be given to *educating* future generations about the gravity of the situation. Forming consciences is a demanding task, one requiring conviction and dedication.

The statistics provided by the United Nations are troubling, nor can they leave us indifferent. Each day a thousand children die from water-related illnesses and millions of persons consume polluted water. These facts are serious; we have to halt and reverse this situation. It is not too late, but it is urgent to realize the need and essential value of water for the good of mankind.

Respect for water is a *condition* for the exercise of the other human rights (cf. *ibid.*, 30). If we consider this right fundamental, we will be laying the foundations for the protection of other rights. But if we neglect this basic right, how will we be able to protect and defend other rights? Our commitment to give water its proper place calls for developing *a culture of care* (cf. *ibid.*, 231) *and encounter*, joining in common cause all the necessary efforts made by scientists and business people, government leaders and politicians. We need to unite our voices in a single cause; then it will no longer be a case of hearing individual or isolated voices, but rather the plea of our brothers and sisters echoed in our own, and the cry of the earth for respect and responsible sharing in a treasure belonging to all. In this culture of encounter, it is essential that each state act as a guarantor of universal access to safe and clean water.

God the Creator does not abandon us in our efforts to provide access to clean drinking water to each and to all. It is my hope that this Conference will help strengthen your convictions and that you will leave in the certainty that your work is necessary and of paramount importance so that others can live. With the “little” we have, we will be helping to make our common home a more liveable and fraternal place, where none are rejected or excluded, but all enjoy the goods needed to live and to grow in dignity.

Thank you.

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