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To all the National Fraternities of the OFS

Subject: The Injustice Of War And The Urgent Need For Peace And Complete Disarmament

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Peace and good!

The words of the Holy Father, Pope Francis are still recalled when asked recently: *"In Ukraine there are those who ask for the courage of surrender, of the white flag. But others say that this would legitimize the strongest. What do you think?"*

He replied: *"It's an interpretation. But I think the stronger one is the one who sees the situation, thinks of the people and has the courage to raise the white flag and negotiate. And today it can be negotiated with the help of international powers. The word negotiate is a courageous word. When you see that you are defeated, that things are not going well, it is necessary to have the courage to negotiate. And you may feel ashamed, but if you continue like this, how many deaths (will there be) then? And it will end even worse. Negotiate in time, look for some country to mediate. Today, for example with the war in Ukraine, there are many who want to mediate. Turkey, for example... Don't be ashamed to negotiate before it's worse."*¹

The Holy Father's thoughts stem from the social teaching of the Church, which aims to be the historical continuation of the religious and social message of Our Lord Jesus Christ. The objective of this teaching is the transformation of human society from within, reading the signs of the times and addressing issues of both the economic-social horizon and the political horizon. In this way the Church becomes the critical conscience of the world and the interpreter of humanity.

Peace among men has always been at the center of the Church's teaching: Pope St. John XXIII in 1963, wrote in the Encyclical *"Pacem in Terris"* that, when speaking of peace, the human person is exalted, establishing a fundamental principle: everything is about the dignity of man, since the origin and purpose of peace lies in respect for each individual person.

Also among the documents of the Second Vatican Council, the Pastoral Constitution *"Gaudium et Spes"* on the Church in the Modern World, addresses the sensitive topic of the absolute condemnation of war and the search for international action to avoid it. It states the following: *"Peace must flow spontaneously from the mutual trust of nations, rather than be imposed on peoples by the terror of arms. That is why everyone must work hard to bring the arms race to an end at last. Because the reduction of armaments must not really begin unilaterally, but at the same pace on both sides, on the basis of common agreements and the adoption of effective*

¹ Pope Francis, Interview with RSI (Swiss Radio Television) of March 20, 2024

guarantees."² With regard to the role of Heads of State in the search for peace, it is affirmed: " *We must pray unceasingly to God that he may give them the strength to undertake with perseverance and to carry out with courage this work of the greatest love for men, through which the edifice of peace is manfully built.*

Such work today certainly demands that they expand their minds and hearts beyond the boundaries of their own nation, laying aside all national selfishness and all ambition for supremacy over other nations, and instead nourishing a deep respect for all humanity, now so laboriously on its way to greater unity."³

At this point we must ask ourselves what is our position as Secular Franciscans on the topic of the injustice of war, the urgency of peace and complete disarmament? The first example can be drawn from our history: The role of *bearers of peace* has been recognized as a peculiar characteristic of the Franciscans since their origins. In the thirteenth century, in contrast to the struggles and vengeance frequently used to resolve disputes, the Franciscans called for harmony and peace. In response to the abuses of the feudal lords, they did their utmost to defend the lowest classes by preaching absolute fidelity to the Church and the Pope. Francis has been seen as a source of inspiration for innovative peace solutions and conflict resolution, a sort of unique model capable of implementing effective initiatives of recomposition and pacification. The Canticle of Brother Sun, the sermon to the birds, the Fioretto in which the story of the Wolf of Gubbio is told, shows Francis as the promoter of man's rediscovered harmony with the entire universe and respect for animals and nature. The meeting with Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil establishes the model of interreligious dialogue. The second example flows from our Rule: "*As bearers of peace and mindful that it must be continually built, let them seek the ways of unity and fraternal understanding, through dialogue, trusting in the presence of the divine seed that is in man and in the transforming power of love and forgiveness.*" (OFS Rule art.19).

At the beginning of the third millennium, humanity is experiencing profound changes that call into question the very world order that emerged after the Second World War: we go from crisis to crisis and "*war is not a ghost of the past but has become a constant threat. The world is finding more and more difficulties in the slow path of peace that it had undertaken and that was beginning to bear some fruit.*"⁴ All this can only strengthen the determination to promote "*the undisputed rule of law and the tireless recourse to negotiation, good offices and arbitration, as proposed by the Charter of the United Nations, a true fundamental juridical norm*".⁵ It follows, therefore, that the whole of Christianity is called to reject the subtle and apparently rational logic that sees, on the one hand, the inevitability of the use of weapons in response to an aggression suffered and, on the other, the start of an inexhaustible arms race which, in order to lead to the liberation of the occupied territories and the restoration of the status quo, triggers an endless conflict that will cause immense devastation and unacceptable loss of human life. The necessary rejection of such a deception must be translated into the duty to promote and have promoted concrete political choices in the search for dialogue and understanding, following the example of the meeting between St. Francis and the Sultan.

We conclude with the words of our seraphic father concerning those who persevere in the following of Our Lord Jesus Christ: "*And all those who continue to do these things and persevere in them to the end, the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon them, and he will make them his dwelling place and dwelling place. And they shall be children of the heavenly Father, whose works they do, and they shall be spouses, brethren, and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ.*"⁶

JUSTICE, PEACE AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION SECRETARIAT

² GS, 82

³ c.s.

⁴ Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter Fratelli Tutti*, 256

⁵ C.S. 257

⁶ 2Lf, X; FF 200