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**EGYPT – Cairo - 28.04.2017 – 16.00**

***Conference Center Al-Azhar*  
Speech of the Grand Imam**

His Holiness Pope Francis of Vatican,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I greet you all with the greeting of peace “*al-Salamu Alaykum wa Rahmatullah wa Barakatuh*”

Al-Azhar and the Muslim Council of Elders (MCE) warmly welcome and thank you all for your honorable acceptance of our invitation. We deeply appreciate your visit to Egypt and Al-Azhar in response to Al-Azhar invitation to undertake our collective historical responsibility as religious leaders and scholars to work for peace and relieve the miser nations, who aimlessly flee wars to vast deserts. Many leave their homelands to other far destinations in pursuit of new hosting homes, while uncertain whether they would reach or die and drown. It is unfortunate to see human bodies and parts of human remains on seashores in a horribly grievous human tragedy. It is not far from the truth to say, ‘unprecedented human tragedy throughout human history.’

People of common sense and watchful conscience try to find out the logic and reasons behind these tragedies for which we all pay lives and countries in futile wars. However, they came to no one logical reason justifying these disasters, which have badly affected the poor, the orphans, the widows, and the aged. Only one reason is there with somewhat reasonability; it is arms trade and marketing that ensures the continuous operation of death plants and extraordinary enrichment resulting from suspicious deals backed by reckless international resolutions. For sake of that hateful trade, hotbeds of tensions are created, and religious seditions and racial and sectarian conflicts and differences among the nationals of the same homeland are inflamed, turning human life into an unbearable miser hell.

Ironically, this sharp disaster is taking place in the 21<sup>st</sup> century presumably the century of civilization, urbanity, human rights, epistemological progresses, and tremendous scientific advancements and technologies. It is also the century of Peace Organizations working for maintaining international peace and security, whose conventions criminalize the use of force or threatening to use it in international relations. This suffering comes in a century of human philosophies and teachings, promotion of human egalitarianism and one-class social equality, and postmodernity among many other achievements for which our modern age is distinguished.

Here, it is crucial to ask how the international peace has become a paradise lost and how the age of human rights has badly plagued with savagely unprecedented atrocities! I have an answer, which you may also approve. I think that the modern civilization has ignored the divine religions and their invariably established ethics that remain the same regardless of earthly interests and purposes, let alone the dominance of desires and pleasures. The first of these ethics is human fraternity and human mutual understanding and mercy, which mindfully depicts the creations as the children of Allah; the most beloved of Allah's children to Allah is that one who extends more benefits to Allah's children. This value can prevent the world from shifting into a wilderness with monstrous animals of prey devouring one another.

Thinkers of the east and the west emphasize that our only solution is to restore awareness of the heavenly revealed religion and review the deviated modernized discourse deeply and critically to free human mind from the claws of the emptiness of the material experimental philosophy. Under such philosophy, minds of human individuals limitlessly go their way and dominate human lives. Post-modernity shall not be a mere process of beautifying such views with band-aid philosophies of affection and passion. For believers and philosophers, there is no way but to reformulate all that in the context of fraternity and mutual mercy before anything else.<sup>1</sup> This context is the antidote

<sup>1</sup> Taha Abdel-Rahman, *Ruh al-Hadatha*, p. 214 [footnotes], (Morocco: Arab Culture Center, 2006).

for reviving philosophies as well as other all-inclusive scientific and practical models. This antidote only exists in the pharmacy of religion.

I do think that the world is currently prepared for religions to undertake their missions. They should stress the value of "peace," justice, equality and human rights regardless of religion, color, race, or language. The Glorious Quran frequently read by Muslims day and night simply declares,

- “We [Allah] have honored the Children of Adam and carried them in the land and the sea.
- We [Allah] have provided for them of the good things.
- We [Allah] have preferred them over many of those We created in a marked preference” (the Quran, 17: 70)

Before anything else, we need to liberate the image of religions from false concepts, misunderstandings, malpractices, and false religiosity attached to them. These evils bestir conflicts, spread hate, and instigate violence. We should not hold religion accountable for the crimes of any small group of followers. For example, Islam is not a religion of terrorism for a group of followers carelessly expedites to manipulate with Islamic texts and misinterpret them ignorantly. Then, they shed blood, kill people, and spread destruction. Unfortunately, they find available sources of finance, weapons, and training. Likewise, Christianity is not a religion of terrorism just because a group of its followers carries the cross and decimates people without distinction between men, women, children, fighters, and captives.

Likewise, Judaism is not a religion of terrorism just because a group of its followers employs the teachings of Moses, God forbids, occupying lands and extirpating millions of the indigenous defenseless civilian citizens of the Palestinian people, who have the original rights to this land. Furthermore, it is not fair to say that the European civilization is a civilization of terrorism because two world wars broke out in Europe leaving behind more than seventy millions of deaths. The same goes true for the American civilization whose atom bombings destroyed everything on earth in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. If we open doors for accusations as opened against Islam, no religion, regime, civilization, or history would stand innocent from violence and terrorism.

Dear Pope, we deeply appreciate your fair declaration in support of the truth and defense of Islam against the accusation of violence and terrorism. We feel how you and all attending notable fathers of eastern and western churches are keen to respect religious beliefs and symbols and safeguard them from any offenses, standing against those who employ such offenses to foment conflicts among the believers.

Al-Azhar is determined to work and cooperate for the calls of establishing coexistence, reviving dialogue, respecting all human beliefs, and protecting them. We have many shared values and fields to work on. Meanwhile, the common challenges that we have to meet, as religious leaders, are also many. Let us work for the infirm, the hungry, the afraid, the prisoners of wars, and all other suffering human beings in the world without discrimination, distinction, or classification. We shall all work together to save human family from the threats of immorality and the violations of scientific research and researchers' deviations and incautiousness.

Let us all save environment from corruption and corrupters. Let us all stand against the policies of hegemony and the theories of the “clash of civilizations,” “the end of history,” “calls to atheism,” “Machiavellian mentality,” and “irreligious modernity” as well as against all bad consequences and disasters that follow them everywhere.

Finally, may Allah—the Source of all Mercy— make this meeting a real opportunity for human cooperation to promote the culture of peace, human fraternity, and coexistence!

Thank you so much.

*“Al-Salamu Alaykum wa Rahmatullah wa Barakatuh”*

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