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Economic Cooperation and Development**

“Religions and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) –
Listening to the cry of the earth and of the poor”

**"Conditions for partnership:
Contribution from a global institutional perspective"**

8 March 2019, Rome

**Your Excellencies,
ladies and gentlemen,**

Hear both the cry of the earth
and the cry of the poor

Pope Francis asks us to do this in in his encyclical
"Laudato Sí".

And Agenda 2030 also asks us to do this – in a
secular way – with its 17 Sustainable Development
Goals.

In today's globalised world, that cry is too loud to be
ignored. The world is more inter-linked than ever.
Goods, services, information and people are moving
around the globe.

The refugee situation has shown, once again, that
the fates of everyone in the world are linked.

Our future depends on the future of people in
other parts of the world. And their future depends
on us.

The "care for our common home" – as Pope Francis called it – is important for all of us.

I am pleased to be here on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development.

This conference looks at three topics that are important for German development cooperation.

They are:

- ending world poverty and stopping our planet Earth from being exploited,
- bringing justice to globalisation, as described in the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs,
- and looking at how religions can help to create a more just world.

We face great challenges:

- 821 million people are suffering from hunger.
- One in ten children across the world have to work.
- A person living in an industrialised country uses three or four times as many resources as someone living in Africa or Asia.
- But it is people in poor countries who suffer first from the impacts of climate change – tropical storms, a rise in sea levels.

Those of us who live in Europe, in the richer countries, are living at the expense of people in other parts of the world. We are living at the expense of the planet.

If everybody lived as we do,
we would need the resources
of two or three planets.

But we only have one planet.

We need to bring justice to globalisation.

That means, above all: sharing out opportunities in a just way. That means access to

- food,
- resources,
- knowledge,
- the right to make one's voice heard.

The 2030 Agenda and the 17 SDGs are a pact on the world's future. They show us the path we need to take towards justice in globalisation.

Sustainability is the principle that must guide everything we do – in politics, business and society.

That is what the 2030 Agenda demands.

In order to achieve this sustainable world, we need people or groups of people who communicate the right values, who can have a positive impact on how people think and act. *The kind of people who are now called "influencers".*

I'm thinking here above all of religions and faith communities.

Preserving creation and caring for society's outcasts, for the poor. Those are values that can be found in all the major world religions.

And religion is both a source of the "ethics of enough" and an understanding of "development" that is not only about economic or technological progress.

Germany is neutral in terms of belief - but not in terms of values. We do not follow "Christian" policies. But our policies are based on a Christian view of humanity and on the principle of Christian responsibility.

Our aim is sustainable development on the basis of shared values:

responsibility, sustainability, moderation and peace.

That is why we want to enter into partnership worldwide with religious communities and religious leaders.

In many of the countries we work with, religions and religious leaders play an important role.

- Four out of five people in our partner countries say that religion plays an important role in their lives.
- In Nigeria, for example, 90 per cent of people go to church every Sunday or to Mosque every Friday. In Germany, however it is only around 6 per cent.

Often the churches in developing countries are the only agencies left on the ground when cooperation with the government has become impossible – during crises, for example, or when countries are unstable.

In many places, they are also the ones who prepare the ground for de-escalation, for dialogue and peace processes.

In our official development cooperation, we want to build on that. We want to build on those many years of experience, on the trust these organisations have, on established networks.

The German development ministry wants to expand its cooperation with faith-based organisations.

For over 50 years, we have been working together closely with the two major Christian churches in Germany.

Now we want to find more new partners.

The principles of our cooperation are that:

- it is based on values that are, as far as possible, shared by all world religions
- and it also takes account of their differences.

The kind of values-based development policy we are pursuing takes the individual seriously.

And so it must also take his or her view of the world seriously. For most people in the world, that view is very much influenced by religion.

We work together wherever we can achieve more together – or prevent worse from happening.

We, as the German government, also have clear limits. For example when religious leaders speak out in favour of discrimination or violence.

Some basic values are non-negotiable – like human rights.

At the same time, we have to talk to those who are seen as critical of "western values". Because we believe:

dialogue is not dangerous. The refusal to engage in dialogue is dangerous.

In Egypt, for example, we are supporting a forum for intercultural dialogue. It brings together Christian and Muslim leaders and also those working in culture and the media.

The forum offers a safe space for discussion, where politically sensitive topics affecting the country's future can also be addressed. For example questions about the development of the state, religion and democracy in Egypt. Or gender equality and social justice.

We have formalised our cooperation with religious communities through the establishment of the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD).

It is a network of 100 government, civil society and religious organisations.

Its aim is: to engage the knowledge and involvement of different faith-based organisations in the spirit of the 2030 Agenda.

The partnership profits from a diverse membership and from the capacities and social capital of the faiths involved.

The aims include improving the health of mothers and children and improving sexual and reproductive health and rights.

25 years ago, at the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, these rights were first recognised as human rights. Great challenges remain, especially in developing countries.

And it is not only today, on International Women's Day, that religions play an especially important role regarding women's rights and their position in society.

Women still suffer discrimination – they are not given access to education of the same quality and too often have no chance to determine their own future. Often this is justified with arguments that come – so it is claimed – from a religious background.

But our development cooperation is unlikely to be successful unless women are involved as equal partners. Women play an important role in bringing up and educating children, as well as for the health and the nutrition of the whole family. They are important as agricultural workers and entrepreneurs. It can be seen that peace negotiations are more successful, and the peace longer lasting, when women are involved.

The challenges of rapid population growth can only be tackled successfully if self-confident, empowered women are involved. In developing countries, every year at least 21 million teenage girls get pregnant unintentionally. Often that means that they lose the chance of education or vocational training. Maternal mortality is also unacceptably high, because women do not have sufficient medical support when pregnant or giving birth.

I want – at the very least – for us to mention crimes against women's and girl's sexual self-determination and physical integrity. We are talking about dignity for millions of women and girls.

We cannot overstate the influence of religions and religious leaders in this context. That is why – as a Deputy Minister in the German government and, above all, as a practising Catholic and chair of a large Catholic women's association in Germany – I am calling on you for your support.

Conferences like this offer an important platform where we can enter into a conversation and bring together all our efforts to achieve a more peaceful and just world – with all of you: civil society, UN, government, religious leaders and FBOs.

In our thoughts and in our deeds, let us take inspiration from words that are attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi:

"Start by doing what is necessary, then do what's possible and suddenly you are doing the impossible!"