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Religions and the Sustainable Development Goals

Remarks by Mr. Michael Møller
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Eminencies
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear friends,

It is a great privilege for me to be with you today.

Allow me to first of all express my gratitude to His Eminence, Cardinal Turkson and the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, as well as to the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, for convening this important conference. Thank you in particular for ensuring all religions are represented here today.

Partnership is the red thread that must run through all our actions to implement the Sustainable Development Goals.

It is important - and timely! Because four years into the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the imperative facing us is clear: we must up our ambition and accelerate our action and we must do it together or we will not make it.

Because for all the positive progress made, it's not nearly fast enough to meet the goals we set ourselves, especially for those furthest behind, most vulnerable, most marginalized.

The world remains on a trajectory of increasing inequality. It is facing armed conflicts, hunger, humanitarian crises, the devastating impacts of climate change, rising intolerance and the erosion of human rights.

International cooperation itself is put into question precisely when it is needed most. To take this unity of purpose, these shared values and aspirations and to derive from them precepts for tangible action on the ground, at the grassroots level – that is what we came here for today.

As I was travelling here from Geneva, I was again reflecting on the relationship between the United Nations and religion.

The United Nations - while being a secular organization - has been aligned with the great faiths of the world since its very inception.

As a beacon of hope for humanity, the UN - like the great faiths - is there to bring people together in the universal aspiration for a better world; a tolerant, peaceful world; a world in which everyone can hope to advance from the circumstances of their birth, irrespective of whether they are born poor or rich, or indeed whether they are born a man or a woman. The UN was created not only for the powerful, but for the marginalized, the downtrodden, the vulnerable. It was created to leave no one behind, an aspiration and clear objective at the very heart of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The great Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld once said and I quote: "The United Nations stands outside - necessarily outside - all confessions. But it is, nevertheless, an instrument of faith. As such, it is inspired by what unites, and not by what divides, the great religions of the world". [End quote]

And it is still true: at the heart of our actions we are dealing in universal values: to be merciful, to be tolerant, to love thy neighbor.

No tradition can claim monopoly on such teachings; they are ingrained in the human spirit, and enshrined in international human rights law. They animate the UN Charter and they encapsulate the essence of the 2030 Agenda.

Over the coming days, as we explore the many aspects of the 2030 Agenda, I hope we will succeed in taking this unity of purpose, our shared values and aspirations - and to derive from them inspiration for tangible, collective actions.

Or to put it more clearly: to take our cooperation from the moral heights of shared values to the ground of

united grassroots action.

Men and women of faith are crucial to our common efforts. Because the 2030 Agenda, as we shall see, is about much more than making sure that basic material needs are met - it's just as much about ensuring that every living person can live a life of dignity, and of spiritual fulfilment.

This is the "deeper and holistic" understanding of the SDGs we will explore together - and it is my sincere hope that it will inspire new paths of action, forge new partnerships, foster solidarity and reinforce a common sense of purpose, and to do so with a renewed sense of urgency.

Thank you.