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Secretary General of Muslim Council of Elders

Thierry de Montbrial, Founder and Executive Chairman of Ifri and the WPC

I would like to thank Your Holiness most warmly for your talk, which is both hopeful and realistic, especially for your call for think tanks, the people who reflect on geopolitical issues, to approach religions without forgetting what they fundamentally are, by not taking them simply as political institutions among others. I think we need to think about that.

Mohamed Abdelsalam, Secretary General of Muslim Council of Elders

In the name of God, the all merciful, good morning everyone. May Allah's peace and blessings be upon all of you. The title of the session is very interesting.

First of all, allow me to express my personal appreciation to you, Your Excellency, Professor Thierry de Montbrial, the Chair of this session, for convening this very important consultative and intellectual meeting which has a very special and much-needed headline and theme: the international system between globalization and disintegration, which forces will prevail? What an interesting question.

Ladies and gentlemen, Your All Holiness, my dear brother Bartholomew 1st, Your Excellency dear Rabbi, my dear brother and dear friend, at the outset, I feel great gratitude and appreciation for inviting me to participate in this high-level meeting.

The World Policy Conference is an esteemed institution, founded and chaired by the venerable Professor Thierry de Montbrial, a distinguished intellectual and expert, Chairman of the French Institute for International Relations (Ifri), which, as we all know, is France's premier and top research center.

I would also like to renew the welcome for the third annual convening of this conference here in Abu Dhabi, a capital city that holds great personal significance for me since this is a place I fondly refer to as the capital of human fraternity. Among its many inspiring milestones, four years ago, it witnessed the historic signing of the document on human fraternity for world peace and living together, by His Holiness, Pope Francis, the Head of the Catholic Church, and his brother, His Eminence the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ash-Sharif, when they visited this country for the first time in history, in the presence of different religious leaders to proclaim and announce the document on human fraternity for all the world.

It is an unprecedented declaration in our modern time history. This was on February 4, 2019, a day which has been announced and adopted by the United Nations General Assembly as an international day of human fraternity, celebrated each year worldwide.

I believe that my participation in this session, which represents the three Abrahamic faiths and discusses the quest for hope and a better world, imparts upon me a particular responsibility to speak about the potential of Islam in fostering this hope.



Its experience is deeply intertwined with the history of the heavenly religions, all of which originated in the Middle East region, a sea upon whose shores prophecies descended and philosophies formed that remain powerfully present and influential in the conscience and thought of humanity.

This is the same region that, to our profound regret, suffers today from a bloody and devastating war which, at every moment, claims the lives of innocent civilians, presenting a scene that imposes a collective responsibility upon us all: not only towards the innocent casualties and the children, but towards our whole humanity worldwide.

It confronts us with the world we live in that is indeed in dire need of a dose of hope that can be forged through our will, the sincerity of our humanity and our belief in justice for achieving peace for all people without discrimination.

The scenes of devastation and bloodshed in Gaza are deep wounds in the body of our humanity. We all agree that healing this wound will take time and it is not easy to address. We are at a turning point in the history of our common humanity and, through the past years, the years we live in and the upcoming years of the future generations, we all hope to see the world respecting human rights generally and not only chanting slogans but activating these motors and slogans on the ground.

Islam has cultivated hope for the future through its universal relationships of man with God, the world and his fellow human beings. It fosters a relationship of trust and hope in God and confidence in his power.

The world is considered as a realm entrusted to humans who bear the responsibility of its stewardship and preservation for the benefit of future generations. It is a relationship with humanity through the values of justice, compassion and solidarity. Therefore, when the Qur'an regards the prophethood of Muhammad, peace be upon him, as the culmination of the divine revelations to humanity, and as a continuation of the message carried by all prophets and describes him as a mercy to the world, it means precisely that.

It really means mercy not only for Muslims but for all people, considering the religion as a beacon of hope for mankind and a mercy for all creatures, precisely as the French author and thinker, André Malraux, affirmed when he said that the 21st century will either be based on spirituality or it will not be at all.

As you have referred to, Your All Holiness, we are in dire need to have the presence of the spirit of faith in our daily life in order to overcome the challenges. Also, it considers the message of this final prophet as a message to all humanity, because universality should be considered as a characteristic that religious message is based on a spiritual faith, voluntary ethical commitment and solidarity for the benefit of mankind.

In contrast, globalization and its cultural aspect seems to be based on homogenization and attempts to externally standardize identities and cultural experiences according to a unified model. From this perspective arises the importance of initiatives that establish universality of religious values, while preserving diversity and harnessing the spiritual power of religions to address the pressing questions of mankind and challenges.

Just as articulated in the document on human fraternity which has been signed by The Pope and The Grand Imam in a moment of hope, we hope that we all build on it all. The Abrahamic Family House in Abu Dhabi provides a common space, not just for coexistence among these three religions but also as a sphere for cooperation among them.



The Abrahamic Family House is a beacon of hope but, at the same time, it also poses a challenge of how we can use this hope to foster peace which is a quest and a cause we all aspire to, but that we miss.

Allow me here to reaffirm that the opening of the Abrahamic Family House in 2023 was, indeed, an extraordinary moment by all standards that allows me to say that I look towards the horizon. I can almost see many generations to come pausing at this moment and reflecting on these steps. The inauguration of the Abrahamic Family House and the signing of the document on human fraternity in Abu Dhabi, the capital city of coexistence and human fraternity, is truly an inspiring moment, inspired by the story of this house by faith, courage, patience and goodwill.

When we have these three houses of virtue in one space, embracing each other, it is sending a message of hope that we all aspire to in our meetings. The reason for the existence of religions is to preserve the reservoir of hope in chanting the common good. This gives us a bright picture for this hope.

However, it also presents a challenge, and this makes it worthwhile to ask how the three monotheistic religions can work together to realize their core shared values. How all religions, not only monotheistic religions, can they adopt a unified stance and send out a unified cry for the realization of justice and peace? I am fully convinced that victory will side with every benevolent force in our world that champions the essence of our humanity which upholds these values and defends them.

As you have mentioned, Your All Holiness, Archbishop Bartholomew, the duty now is imparted on religious leaders and faith leaders, and it is a great challenge. We have many challenges in every aspect of life: the challenge of international wars, internal wars and conflicts; and we have a catastrophic challenge that threatens the future of our future generations, which is the climate change crisis.

Your Excellency, Professor, I would like to thank you profoundly because you truly believe in the role of religions and the contribution and the voice of faith leaders. And I invite you, with other intellectuals and highly influential experts and people, to dedicate their efforts to the cause of humanity, because more than 84% of the world's population is religious and affiliated to a faith or a religion.

The voice of religion is very important and our world today is in dire need for having the voice of religious leaders. I was very happy when I heard President Macron, in a conference in Rome in 2021, say: 'In our world today, politicians need the voice of religion'. Now we are facing the challenge of climate change and the United Arab Emirates is hosting the COP28.

Tomorrow, we will have evidence that highlights the importance of the voice of religion as we organize a global faith leaders' summit that brings all faith leaders in one meeting and in one summit, representing all faith and religious denominations worldwide, and also those who do not believe, the non-believers in our world. They all stand in unity and solidarity to send a unified message and voice to the leaders of our world, who will be convening at the COP28.

It is also further evidence that our world will need the voice of religious leaders that the COP28, for the first time in history, will have faith pavilion during it. For almost 13 days, we will host and will welcome more than 300 speakers from different parts of the world. They will reflect, think and discuss the challenges of climate change and how faith-based organizations and religious people and leaders can contribute to addressing this crisis. This faith pavilion is



a coordinated cooperation between the Muslim Council of Elders, the COP 28 Presidency and the United Nations Environment Programme.

To conclude, I would like to thank you all and would like to thank you, Professor. We have to seize this opportunity to inspire people with a message of hope.

Thank you, all.

Thierry de Montbrial

Your Excellency, thank you very much. I would like to stress what you and the patriarch said about the responsibility of religious leaders. You can see that even a meeting like ours this morning shows a certain amount of courage because being able to say things like that at a time of major crisis when religions are intertwined is very significant.