

## **In the name of Allah, The All-Merciful, The Ever-Merciful**

**Dear Readers,**

**May peace and the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon you.**

Some cities are famous for prominent landmarks. Rome is known for the Papal Basilica of Saint Peter in the Vatican; London for its Big Ben Tower clock; Paris for the Eiffel Tower; New York for the Statue of Liberty, and Cairo for its pyramids/Minarets.

Recently, two major figures, one of Christianity and one of Islam, came together to add to these landmarks - a new milestone of truth, goodness, freedom, and fraternity. At the mention of **“Human Fraternity”**, free minds and conscious hearts turn to His Holiness Pope Francis and the Grand Imam Ahmad al-Tayeb, Sheikh of Al-Azhar Al-Sharif. These two personalities, which together have forged a distinctive landmark, not for any specific country nor for a specific people, but as a powerful symbol of a noble idea. It is a sign of God’s mercy that He has enabled these two noble figures to serve this supreme idea of **“Human Fraternity”**.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Just as one of life’s natural laws encompasses growth and renewal, another is reflection and creativity. Life is enabled with these, and it ceases without them. What we see in the highest Office of the Vatican is the best evidence that all is well in our lives, and that the foundations of creativity required to construct new visions for humanity, will elevate us towards new horizons. These, in turn, will permeate all corners of space, and all depths of time.

No sooner had His Holiness added his signature of affirmation to the "Document of Human Fraternity", than he embarked to continue the journey towards this Encyclical. With his heightened sensitivities and purity of instincts, His Holiness reflects on the reality of our communities, wherein happiness is shrouded in ambiguity and darkness. Complicated by an overlap of interests and policies, and disputed over between nation states and peoples. With that in mind, the Pope took the initiative to use his courageous pen to record, with his frank words - which fear nothing but God - the traumas of the weak, exhausted, and the miserable, and to write a prescription for this calamitous disease faced by our people in contemporary times. Thus, he delivers the Encyclical we celebrate today.

Although I witnessed most of the stages of the journey of co-creating human fraternity in the last decade between the Pope and the Imam, when I read this Encyclical “The Message of Fraternity and Social Friendship”, I nevertheless re-encountered, in its words, perfection of sentiment, heightened sensitivity and eloquence of expressions of human fraternity – all in ways that speak universally. It is an appeal to come together in a world torn asunder, a clarion call for individual and collective harmony with the laws of the universe, and with the intricacies of our existence. He reaches out to the world with a clear vision and evidenced realities.

**Distinguished Attendees,**

As a young Muslim who studied the jurisprudences and sciences of Islam, I find that I, with much love and enthusiasm, agree with the Pope on every word he writes in his Encyclical. Indeed, I find contentment and hope in each of the suggestions he makes to resurrect human fraternity.

In this document, the Pope warns - without ambiguity or hesitancy- of ideologies imbued with selfishness and lack of social sensitivities, operating under the aegis of alleged national interests. He warns us of the dangers of globalization and its consequences, which may have brought us closer, but not as brethren.

I am also well pleased as I read the Pope's harsh criticism of what he calls "the end of the awareness of history". The latter contains an element of dangerous cultural abuse which seeks to discard legacies and values of social cohesion, and leads to the creation of generations which despise their cultural heritage and history, with all the spiritual wealth they each contain.

He is equally creative in speaking of "**human rights**" as he juxtaposes to the new forms of human injustice, exploitation, loss of human dignity, the injustices against women. Indeed His Holiness considers that persecution on religious and ethnic grounds, and other violations of human dignity are features of a Third World War -albeit segmented.

He is masterful in his expose of the realities of immigration and refugees. He underlines how human dignity has been sacrificed at the borders between Europe and the developing world.

He comments on the overall context we are living in - the Corona pandemic – as he elaborates on other catastrophes of our shared history, and calls for a fundamental reimagining of the modalities of our lives and the structures of our societies.

Unlike my usual ponderous deliberations on my every word, I found myself carried along by the fervour of honesty and clarity of vision in the words of Pope Francis, as he explicates the intricacies of human life. The resonance of his words in this great Encyclical, with those in "the Document of Human Fraternity" effectively set in motion the wheels of history which have - until this moment – been grounded at the station of a world order rooted in the absurd. I sincerely hope that this Papal message and the Document of Human Fraternity will be strong barriers against falsehood in all its forms. Moreover I hope that they will be the basis, or the most important factor, in establishing a new world order based on the sanctity of human dignity. I also hope that this message will be a reference to all politicians and decision-makers, so that they use it in moving out the current state of the absurd.

Are we able now to practically realise these brilliant aspirations and elevated concepts? I believe it is possible. Sensible people are supporters of goodness and advocates thereof.

As a modest contribution in this field, my colleagues in the Higher Committee for Human Fraternity, and I, have discussed the establishment of a forum for one hundred youth around the world, with a view to devote some school days to learn about and discuss these documents. Some of these days would be hosted in Rome, others in Abu Dhabi (the country which hosted the declaration of the Document of Human Fraternity), and yet others in Egypt, the country of Al-Azhar. During these days, as the youth focus on meditation, study and open in-depth discussions, this would constitute a manifestation of the message to all regardless of religion, race or any diversities. Perhaps this would be a step on the right path towards universal human fraternity.

## **Ladies and Gentlemen!**

We are in a defining moment in the history of humankind. We stand at the crossroads of either a common fraternity that will make humans happy, or an intense and increasingly painful misery. The path of fraternity is an old, new, and renewed one, shaded by ethical spiritual values, and governed by balance and harmony between science and faith. Let us all collaborate on the path of acquaintance and cooperation to achieve the goal where all of our higher aspirations and valiant of destinies meet: that of human fraternity.

We call for the power of faiths united, to confront discrimination, racism and hatred. Simultaneously, we are seeking to nurture the fountains of all faiths, as we nuance appreciations of their respective and multiple strengths, to protect any and all from disintegration and dissolution. This is the mission for all people of faith.

Universal fraternity thus remains an inevitable necessity for the whole world to achieve salvation. Because it will be a new formulation for a happy, balanced joint humanity, the essence of it which is the human being, regardless of color, gender, language/ethnicity, or religion.

I end with these words to His Holiness Pope Francis and His Eminence the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar:

“Your efforts and struggle to achieve human coexistence and global fraternity, which culminated in the Document of Human Fraternity - which you announced in an unprecedented scene in our modern history, from Abu Dhabi last year - represented a peak of hope and transformation in our Arab and Islamic regions, which is spreading throughout the world. Every day, we see young people rallying around the principles of fraternity and coexistence, and we witness unprecedented eagerness in openness towards relationships between followers of religions. Indeed, many people with an intellectual bias against other religions -or any religion – are re-evaluating some of their reflections.

Together with my colleagues in the Higher Committee for Human Fraternity, we promise you that we will continue to work with all sincerity to transform this Encyclical into a reality for all peoples, through realistic and ambitious initiatives, which the Committee is already seeking to embark on. The Committee is privileged and grateful to have the sincere and systematic support from His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan - an authentic Arab leader - who remains steadfast in his commitment to realise the principles of the *Document of Human Fraternity*, such that every person on earth, regardless of religion, gender or race, can reap its fruits.

Thank you, Your Holiness, for this strong and bold Papal message.

## **Mohammed Abdul Salam**

Secretary General of the Higher Committee for Human Fraternity

Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates,

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