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Pope Francis

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## Video Message to Participants to OIEC's World Congress in New York

Pope Francis

**Abstract:** In his video message sent on the occasion of the closing plenary of OIEC's World Congress, Pope Francis expressed sincere gratitude for all those who work in Catholic education. "I thank you for this service, and through you I would like to convey my sincere gratitude to all those who work in Catholic education: lay people, men and women religious, and priests," he said. He also conveyed his warmest greetings to millions of students who attend Catholic institutes in city centers, making special mention of Catholic school students who live in the peripheries of society. The Pope said young people are the "today" of God and are the today of the Catholic Church's educational mission. The OIEC International Congress 2019 — taking place under the theme *Educatio Si* — "Be educated" — is strongly focused on Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si* (2015) and on the contribution of Catholic schools to teaching the values of solidarity, humanism, and the safeguarding of the common house.

**M**adame President, Mr. Secretary General, Dear friends! I am happy to convey my most cordial greetings to all of you, who give life in the City of New York to the World Congress of OIEC on the topic: To Educate to fraternal humanism in order to build the civilization of love. I wish to extend a special greeting to your President, Madame Augusta Muthigani and to the Secretary General, Mr. Philippe Richard, as well as to the Secretaries of the Regional Committees of OIEC, and to the members of the different organizations.

Your committed participation is a clear manifestation of the passion with which you live the educational mission in the spirit of the Gospel and according to the teachings of the Church. I am grateful to you for this service, and, through you, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all those who work in Catholic teaching, including the lay faithful, women-religious, men-religious,

and priests. My thought goes with affection to the millions of female and male students who attend Catholic institutions in the cities and above all in the peripheries, as well as to their families. The young, as I have said during the World Youth Day in Panama, belong to the today of God, and therefore they are also the today of our educational mission.

The deepening that you intend to undertake on the contribution of education to fraternal humanism should be understood as in line with the Declaration of the Second Vatican Council *Gravissimum Educationis* and I quote the Council:

All men of every race, condition and age, since they enjoy the dignity of a human being, have an inalienable right to an education that is in keeping with their ultimate goal, their ability, their sex, and the culture and tradition of their country, and also in harmony with their fraternal association with other peoples in the fostering of true unity and peace on earth. (Paul VI, \$, no. 1)

Furthermore:

Therefore children and young people....should be so trained to take their part in social life that properly instructed in the necessary and opportune skills they can become actively involved in various community organizations, open to discourse with others and willing to do their best to promote the common good. (no. 1)

This is the teaching of the Second Vatican Council.

Therefore, the humanism that Catholic educational institutions are called to build — as it was asserted by Saint John Paul II (2000):

...advocates a vision of society centered on the human person and his inalienable rights, on the values of justice and peace, on a correct relationship between individuals, society and the State, on the logic of solidarity and subsidiarity. It is a humanism capable of giving a soul to economic progress itself, so that it may be directed to "the promotion of each individual and of the whole person" (Paul VI, 1967, no. 14). (John Paul II, 2000, no. 6)

This humanistic perspective today must include ecological education aimed at promoting an alliance between humanity and the environment, in the different levels of "ecological equilibrium: the inner one with ourselves, the one in solidarity with the others, the natural one with the living beings, the spiritual one with God" (Francis, 2015, no. 210).

We are dealing with a difficult challenge that cannot be faced alone, isolated. It is also for this that the sharing you will live during the days of your Congress is a very important experience in order to accomplish a work of discernment, facing opportunities and difficulties, and to renew your "educational bet," tapping also into the great witnessing of the Holy Men and Women educators, whose example is a luminous beacon that could brighten our service.

One of the principal difficulties that education encounters today is the diffused tendency to deconstruct humanism. Individualism and consumerism generate a competition that debases cooperation, tarnishes common values, and undermines the roots of the basic rules of living together. Even the culture of indifference that involves the relationships between persons and people, as well as the care for the common home, corrodes the sense of humanism.

In order to face this deconstruction we need to build synergy between different educational realities. The first is the family, as the first place where we are taught to come out of ourselves and “to stand in front of the other, in order to listen, share, support, respect and help to live together” (Francis, 2016, no. 276).

All educators are called to respond to this process of growth in humanity with their own professional skills and their own coherent witnessing in their own lives, in order to help youth become active builders in a world that lives in solidarity and is peaceful. In a very special way, Catholic educational institutions have the mission to offer horizons open to transcendence, because Catholic education “makes the difference” by cultivating spiritual values in youth.

To rebuild humanism means also to direct the educational work towards the peripheries, the social peripheries as well as the existential peripheries. Through service, meeting and welcoming, we offer opportunities to the weakest and most vulnerable. In this fashion we grow together and mature by understanding the needs of the “other.” Thus, the educational community, through its patient daily work, generates an ample inclusion which goes beyond the walls of a school and extends itself, with its transforming capacity, to society as a whole, favoring encounter, peace and reconciliation.

To this intent, I would like to draw attention to some points of reflection and action proposed in the *Documento sulla Fratellanza Umana* which I have signed recently with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar.

Another danger which threatens the delicate task of education is the dictatorship of the results. It considers the person as an object, “a laboratory,” and has no interest for her integral growth. It furthermore ignores her difficulties, her errors, her fears, her dreams, her liberty. This approach — dictated by the logic of production and consumerism — places the emphasis mainly on the economy and seems to be willing to equalize men and machines.

In order to overcome this obstacle, we need to place at the center of the educational action the person in her full integrity. To this end, the educator must be competent, qualified, and at the same time rich in humanity, capable of mingling with the students in order to promote their human and spiritual growth.

The educator must possess high quality teaching, as well as capability of attention and loving care for students as persons. To achieve both these qualities, there is need for permanent

formation or training that may help teachers and administrators to maintain a high standard of professionalism and, at the same time, take care of their faith and their spiritual motivation.

Today, education should face also the obstacle of the so called “*rapidacion*” (in English, *rapidification* or continued acceleration) which relegates existence in the vortex of velocity, changing continuously the points of reference. In this context, the very identity loses consistency and the psychological structure disintegrates in front of a continuous transformation that “contrasts with the natural slowness of the biological evolution” (Francis, 2015, no. 18).

To the chaos of velocity, we should respond by giving back to time its primary factor, especially during the evolving age from infancy to adolescence. Indeed, the person needs her own time frame in order to be able to learn, consolidate, and transform her knowledge. To find back time means, furthermore, to appreciate silence and linger in contemplating the beauty of creation, finding inspiration to protect our “common home” and developing initiatives aimed at proposing new styles of life in the respect of future generations. It is an act of responsibility for our posterity, for which we cannot remain unconcerned.

Your being together during these days becomes a great opportunity to revitalize the momentum for Catholic education that gave life to OIEC as a global network of national and international realities. It is furthermore an occasion to take up with enthusiasm the present educational challenge in a globalized and digitalized world, as well as to re-launch your willingness to cooperate with international organizations.

I therefore wish to all of you that you may continue in your educational mission with the joy of your action and the patience of listening. Let us not lose confidence! As Saint Elizabeth Ann Bailey Seton used to say, we must always “look up” without any fear. Let us work together to liberate education from a relativistic horizon and open it to the integral formation of everyone and of all.

I am grateful for the work you do to transform educational institutions into places and experiences of growth in the light of the Gospel, to make these institutions “building places” of fraternal humanism in order to build the civilization of love. I pray for you and also you, please, pray for me. Thank you!

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