

Astalli Centre - Message on the occasion of the presentation of the 2020 Report

From the beloved and tormented Syria, where I have been the Pope's Representative for 11 years, I have the pleasure of cordially greeting all of you, dear friends of the Centro Astalli, on the occasion of the presentation of the 2020 Report. In particular, Fr. Camillo, President of the Centre, the workers, the volunteers and, above all, the many refugees you accompany every day on the process of socio-cultural integration.

During the meeting with the Ambassadors accredited to the Holy See for the exchange of greetings on January 9, Pope Francis warned of the "cloud of silence that risks falling over the war that has devastated Syria over the course of the last decade".

On the same tone, I would also like to share with you the heartfelt appeal of the Syrian journalist under the pseudonym Waad Al- Kateab, who fled during the bitter battle of Aleppo in December 2016 and now lives in Europe. She wrote some time ago: "We Syrians are left to face death alone. Over the past nine years we have been killed in every way possible... But I believe the hardest way to be killed is in silence, so I keep telling our stories" (The New York Times International Edition, 7 February 2020).

This humanitarian catastrophe, which is the most serious caused by humans after the end of the Second World War, has been defined among other things as "*a hell... a sea of pain...a modern Calvary...*" In addition to the many dead and wounded, it is a *Via Dolorosa* which is thousands of kilometres long. It winds through villages and cities of Syria, across the seas, and lands in various nations and continents with often separated families. It is a *Via Dolorosa* traversed by half of the Syrian population, consisting of 12 million of internally displaced people and refugees. Forced to hastily leave their homes, they fled their villages and hometowns, only carrying a few household goods or even as little as the clothes they were wearing. It is a *Via Dolorosa* traversed sometimes in the snow or rain by women and children mostly. Some of whom did not make it through the year.

Alongside these poor people, it is dutiful to remember the different Humanitarian Organizations and many Good Samaritans, among those is JRS.

My hope is that those who, out of necessity, have arrived in Italy and in Europe, or in other nations, may find a concrete and generous solidarity, which is the European ideal repeatedly evoked by Pope Francis.

Speaking of the current pandemic, he said a few weeks ago: "*We have realized that we are all in the same boat*". And we can add that if the boat doesn't hold in Idlib, Syria, or anywhere else in the world, the safety of all is at risk.

Dear friends, I congratulate you on what you are already doing, and I invite you to continue with the words of encouragement of Pope Francis. In front of St. Peter's Basilica a few weeks ago, on the occasion of the prayer vigil for the victims of the current pandemic, he said: "*The Lord invites us to reawaken and put into practice that solidarity... to allow new forms of hospitality, fraternity and solidarity*".

From the "Via of Damascus", a virtual hug!

Damascus May 20, 2020

Card. Mario Zenari

Apostolic Nuncio