



# The Holy See

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APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS  
TO SRI LANKA AND THE PHILIPPINES  
(12-19 JANUARY 2015)

**INTERRELIGIOUS AND ECUMENICAL GATHERING**

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS***

*Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall, Colombo*  
*Tuesday, 13 January 2015*

**[Multimedia]**

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*Dear Friends,*

I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in this meeting which brings together, among others, the four largest religious communities integral to the life of Sri Lanka: Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. I thank you for your presence and for your warm welcome. I also thank those who have offered prayers and blessings, and in a particular way I express my gratitude to Bishop Cletus Chandrasiri Perera and to the Venerable Vigithasiri Niyangoda Thero for their kind words.

I have come to Sri Lanka in the footsteps of my predecessors Popes Paul VI and John Paul II to demonstrate the great love and concern which the Catholic Church has for Sri Lanka. It is a particular grace for me to visit the Catholic community here, to confirm them in their Christian faith, to pray with them and to share their joys and sufferings. It is equally a grace to be with all of you, men and women of these great religious traditions, who share with us a desire for wisdom, truth and holiness.

At the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church declared her deep and abiding respect for other religions. She stated that she “rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for their manner of life and conduct, their precepts and doctrines” (Nostra

Aetate, 2). For my part, I wish to reaffirm the Church's sincere respect for you, your traditions and beliefs.

It is in this spirit of respect that the Catholic Church desires to cooperate with you, and with all people of good will, in seeking the welfare of all Sri Lankans. I hope that my visit will help to encourage and deepen the various forms of interreligious and ecumenical cooperation which have been undertaken in recent years.

These praiseworthy initiatives have provided opportunities for dialogue, which is essential if we are to know, understand and respect one another. But, as experience has shown, for such dialogue and encounter to be effective, it must be grounded in a full and forthright presentation of our respective convictions. Certainly, such dialogue will accentuate how varied our beliefs, traditions and practices are. But if we are honest in presenting our convictions, we will be able to see more clearly what we hold in common. New avenues will be opened for mutual esteem, cooperation and indeed friendship.

Such positive developments in interreligious and ecumenical relations take on a particular significance and urgency in Sri Lanka. For too many years the men and women of this country have been victims of civil strife and violence. What is needed now is healing and unity, not further conflict and division. Surely the fostering of healing and unity is a noble task which is incumbent upon all who have at heart the good of the nation, and indeed the whole human family. It is my hope that interreligious and ecumenical cooperation will demonstrate that men and women do not have to forsake their identity, whether ethnic or religious, in order to live in harmony with their brothers and sisters.

How many ways there are for the followers of the different religions to carry out this service! How many are the needs that must be tended to with the healing balm of fraternal solidarity! I think in particular of the material and spiritual needs of the poor, the destitute, those who yearn for a word of consolation and hope. Here I think too of the many families who continue to mourn the loss of their loved ones.

Above all, at this moment of your nation's history, how many people of good will are seeking to rebuild the moral foundations of society as a whole? May the growing spirit of cooperation between the leaders of the various religious communities find expression in a commitment to put reconciliation among all Sri Lankans at the heart of every effort to renew society and its institutions. For the sake of peace, religious beliefs must never be allowed to be abused in the cause of violence and war. We must be clear and unequivocal in challenging our communities to live fully the tenets of peace and coexistence found in each religion, and to denounce acts of violence when they are committed.

Dear friends, I thank you once again for your generous welcome and your attention. May this

fraternal encounter confirm all of us in our efforts to live in harmony and to spread the blessings of peace.