

Good morning, good afternoon or good evening to all
Your Eminence,
Distinguished speakers,
Dear friends,

On behalf of the World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations, I warmly welcome each of you to this interreligious and ecumenical encounter under the theme: **"Women of Faith: Bearers of Peace and Hope."** I extend my heartfelt gratitude to His Eminence Cardinal Koovakad, Prefect of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue, for his presence and constant encouragement, and to all our distinguished speakers who have generously accepted our invitation. I am certain that your wisdom and lived experiences will enlighten and inspire us all.

Today's gathering is part of a journey that began several years ago. Since 2019, WUCWO has celebrated International Women's Day through an interreligious and ecumenical dialogue path with women leaders from different faith traditions. In 2020, we began collaborating closely with the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue in this shared commitment.

Throughout these years, this meeting has always been more than a conference. It has been a space of reflection, openness and sisterhood. A symbol of unity — unity as members of one human family, and unity as women committed to peace and encounter. We have discovered that when women of faith meet, we do not separate the intellectual from the emotional, the public from the private, the religious from the social, the professional from the familial. **Our lives are integrated, complicated, full and deeply rooted in our faith, and so is our dialogue. And this is precisely where its strength lies.**

Sadly, as we gather here today, the world is increasingly living in uncertainty, conflict and suffering. Just days ago, during the Angelus, Pope Leo XIV expressed "deep concern" over the recent events in the Middle East and Iran. He reminded us that stability and peace are not built with mutual threats nor with weapons that sow destruction and death, but only through reasonable, authentic and responsible dialogue. He has made peace a central theme of his pontificate, calling for an "unarmed and disarming" peace; a humble and persevering peace that begins in the heart.

As he reminded us in his message for Peace 2026: "Peace exists; it wants to dwell within us. It has the gentle power to enlighten and expand our understanding; it resists and overcomes violence". Let us welcome it and recognize it, rather than believing it to be impossible and beyond our reach.

Many people sincerely long for peace, but they feel powerless before the complexity of global events. Some propose violence as a solution. As women of faith and hope **we are convinced that peace is possible and that we must never resign ourselves to conflict.** We reinforce our prayers and daily efforts, knowing that we can help rediscover the path to reconciliation.

As women of faith and protagonists in the world we know that **Peace, ultimately, is not a word or a vague desire. It is not an abstract promise. It is a concrete mission. It is an act of love that must be carried out every day and everywhere.** We are called to be women leaders who build bridges and educate for peace in our families and our communities; women who promote and live interreligious and ecumenical dialogue; who care for creation as our Common Home; who defend life, the dignity of every person and protect especially the most vulnerable; who work for religious

freedom, non-discrimination, women leadership and a culture of encounter. Our service, often silent but persistent and brave, is already a concrete way of building that disarmed and disarming peace of which Pope Leo speaks.

This is the journey that Nostra Aetate invites us to continue - to walk together in hope. As the Holy Father reminded us: “when we do so, something beautiful happens: hearts open, bridges are built and new paths appear where none seemed possible. This is not the work of one religion, one nation, or even one generation. **It is a sacred task for all humanity - to keep hope alive, to keep dialogue alive and to keep love alive in the heart of the world.**”

To conclude, **promoting dialogue between cultures and religions is not optional, it is essential. To be women of dialogue means to remain deeply rooted in our own faith traditions while cultivating openness, attentive listening and respect for those who come from different backgrounds** “always placing the human person, human dignity, and our relational and communal nature at the centre”.

Participation in interreligious dialogue recognises that religion is not merely private, but it is a social value. Religion, at its heart, speaks of connection. When authentically lived, it enhances relationships and helps societies flourish. **And how urgently today we need to reaffirm the value of authentic human relationships, relationships that resist division, polarization and indifference!**

We represent today an interreligious network of women cultivating encounter among peoples, peace and hope. An authentic encounter is the path to face our common challenges with hope. We committed ourselves to educate, to act together for peace, to amplify women’s leadership, and to model a manner of dialogue marked by presence, humility, resilience, and gentle strength.

As a mother, a grandmother, a woman of faith, **I choose dialogue over suspicion, encounter over bitter division, forgiveness over resentment, what unite us over what separate us, hope over resignation, peace over conflict.**

May this encounter strengthen our shared commitment. May it renew our courage. And **may we continue to walk together, across traditions, cultures, religions and continents, as bearers of peace and hope for our wounded yet beloved world.**

Thank you very much.