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Message to Buddhists for the Feast of Vesakh 2007

Christians and Buddhists: Educating
Communities to Live in Harmony and Peace

Paul Cardinal Poupard, President
Archbishop Pier Luigi Celata, Secretary
Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue

Dear Buddhist Friends,

1. On the occasion of the festival of Vesakh, I am writing to Buddhist communities in different parts of the world to convey my own good wishes, as well as those of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.
2. We, Catholics and Buddhists, enjoy a good relationship and our contacts, collaboration and implementation of diverse programmes have helped to deepen our understanding of each other. Dialogue is the sure path to fruitful interreligious relations. It deepens respect and nurtures the desire to live in harmony with others.
3. The Second Vatican Council teaches that the entire human race shares a common origin and a common destiny: God, our Creator and the goal of our earthly pilgrimage. Similarly, Pope Benedict XVI, in his 2007 Message for the World Day of Peace, observed: "*As one created in the image of God, each individual human being has the dignity of a person; he or she is not just something, but someone, capable of self-knowledge, self-possession, free self-giving and entering into communion with others*" (n. 2).
4. Building a community requires concrete gestures which reflect the respect for the dignity of others. Furthermore, as religious people, we are convinced that "there is a moral logic which is built into human life and which makes possible dialogue between individuals and peoples" (ibid, n. 3). Yet, there are people today who still need to learn about others and other people's beliefs in order to overcome prejudices and misunderstandings. This sad reality, if it is to be overcome, demands much effort

on the part of both civic and religious leaders. Even in places where people experience daily the ravages of war, fueled by sentiments of hatred and vengeance, trust can be restored. Together we can help to create the space and the opportunities for people to talk, listen, share regrets and offer forgiveness for each other's past mistakes.

5. Education for peace is a responsibility which must be borne by all sectors of society. Of course, this starts in ordinary homes where the family, the fundamental pillar of society, strives to transmit traditional and sound values to children by a deliberate effort to inform their consciences. The younger generations deserve and indeed thrive upon value-based education which reinforces respect, acceptance, compassion and equality. It is important therefore that schools, both government and faith-based, do all possible to support parents in the delicate but satisfying task of raising children to appreciate all that is good and true.
6. The media's power to shape minds, especially of the young, cannot be underestimated. While the irresponsible elements within it are increasingly being recognized for what they are, it is also the case that much good can be effected through quality productions and educational programmes. When people working within the media exercise their moral conscience, it is possible to dispel ignorance and impart knowledge, preserve social values, and portray the transcendental dimension of life which arises from the spiritual nature of all people. Religious believers serve society admirably by collaborating in such projects for the common good.
7. Ultimately, the aim of true education is to bring the individual to encounter the ultimate purpose of life. This motivates the person to serve broken humanity. Together may we continue to contribute toward peace and harmony in our society and the world. We Catholics join you with our heartfelt greetings as you celebrate this feast and I wish you once again a happy Vesakh.