



PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR
INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

*Christians and Buddhists,
Together Fostering Reconciliation*

MESSAGE FOR THE FEAST OF HANA MATSURI IN JAPAN
8 APRIL 2017

Vatican City

Dear Buddhist Friends in Japan,

1. The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue joyfully greets all of you as you celebrate *Hana Matsuri*, the Buddha's Birthday, on the 8th of April. It is our prayerful wish that this annual religious feast may bring joy and peace to your families as well as to the different Buddhist communities.
2. This year, may we take this opportunity to reflect with you on the importance and the power of reconciliation in fostering a peaceful society. One of the important aspects of reconciliation is to deal with the sensitive aspects of the historical wounds caused by past conflicts. In this regard, the recent visits of the former US President Barack Obama to Hiroshima and subsequently of the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to the US naval base at Pearl Harbour remind us that wars can end and enemies can become friends on the basis of common interests and shared values. Such symbolic gestures not only allow us to remember the agony of wars but also to take substantive measures never to repeat them again. Pope Francis notes, "Some peoples, and indeed entire nations, thanks to the efforts of nonviolent leaders, peacefully achieved the goals of freedom and justice. This is the path to pursue now and in the future. This is the way of peace. Not a peace proclaimed by words but in fact denied by pursuing strategies of domination, backed up by scandalous outlays for arms, while so many people lack the very necessities of life" (*Address of Pope Francis*, 15 December 2016).
3. We all are aware of the mutual relationship between prayer, dialogue and reconciliation. The theme of this year "reconciliation" will have a special meaning because of the 30th Anniversary of the Religious Summit Meeting on Mt. Hiei on 3-4 August. Prayer and dialogue have the power to purify our hearts and minds poisoned by the acid of hatred and vengeance; to heal our wounded memories; to move us from a situation of conflict to friendship and to encourage us to support the efforts towards restoring our ruptured communication and social fabric. We live in a deeply broken world, and therefore, as religious leaders, we have a moral duty to prevent and resolve conflicts, and also to reconcile divided societies.

4. It is obvious that since the root causes of violent conflicts are multiple – political, economic, military, cultural and religious interests – the efforts to foster reconciliation must involve collective work directed to all sectors of society as well as to all the relevant partners. Therefore, today, in our wounded and broken world, we have a common task of reaching out to both the victim and the perpetrator, helping them to recover their lost humanity, working to uproot the causes of conflicts and violence and collaborating with followers of all religions and people of goodwill to transform dehumanized societies into reconciled ones.
5. We know well that violent conflicts have an adverse effect especially on the lives of children. During conflicts, history, culture and sacred scriptures are often mutilated, distorted and misinterpreted by prejudices and territorial ambitions. Therefore, education plays an extremely important role in reconciling societies, groups, and individuals – especially children – divided by violent conflict. As religious leaders, it is our duty to guide our children towards imbibing universal values.
6. Dear Buddhist friends, in this spirit once again allow us to express our cordial greetings and to wish Happy *Hana Matsuri* to you all!

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