**Pope Francis Press Engagement on the flight from Rome to Singapore**

**Matteo Bruni:** Greetings, Your Holiness. Thank you for these many days of this journey, and for helping us feel more of the people's joy than our own fatigue. The journalists traveling with you have some questions.

**[Pope Francis**:] First, I want to thank all of you for your work and company on this journey; it’s very important to me. And I also want to congratulate the ‘dean,’ Valentina Alazraki, as this marks her 160th trip. I won’t tell her to retire, but rather that I hope she continues. Now, please go ahead with your questions, and thank you!

**Pei Ting Wong (The Straits Times)**

*Pope Francis, I'm very happy… I hope you enjoyed your visit to Singapore and perhaps tried the local food. What did you observe of Singapore’s culture and people? Were you surprised by anything? What can Singapore learn from the other three countries we visited? Specifically, your message about fair wages for low-paid migrants resonated with many Singaporeans. What inspired that message, and what are your thoughts on it? Lastly, you said Singapore has a special role on the international stage. What can Singapore do in a world at war, and how can the Vatican contribute diplomatically?*

**Pope Francis**: Thank you. First of all, I didn’t expect to find Singapore as it is. They call it the “New York of the East,” a developed, clean country with polite people, tall skyscrapers, and a great religious culture. The interreligious meeting I had was a model of fraternity. Regarding migrants, I saw luxurious skyscrapers, and then others that, while not as grand, were still clean and well-maintained, which I appreciated. I didn’t feel there was discrimination. I was struck by the culture, particularly with the students. For example, the last day I was struck by that culture.

And then Singapore’s international role. Well, I saw that next week there’s a Formula 1 race. The international role of a capital that attracts different cultures; it is a great capital. I didn’t expect to find something like that.

**Q: What did you learn?**

**Pope Francis**: You know, there’s always something to learn, because every person and country have different riches. That’s why fraternity in communication is so important. For example, in Timor-Leste, I saw many children, but in Singapore not so many. Perhaps that’s something to learn. The future lies with children; consider this. Ah, one other thing: you residents of Singapore are very friendly, always smiling!

**Delfim De Oliveira (GMN TV)**

*At the end of the Mass in Taci Tolu, you drew attention to the presence of crocodiles. What did you mean by that?*

**Pope Francis**: I used the image of crocodiles coming ashore. Timor-Leste has a simple, joyful family culture. There are many children, so many! When I spoke of crocodiles, I was referring to ideas from outside that could ruin the harmony you have. Let me tell you this: I’ve fallen in love with Timor-Leste. Anything else?

**Delfim De Oliveira (GMN TV)**

*In Timor-Leste, Catholics are the majority, but there is a growth of sects. Did the term "crocodiles" also refer to them?*

**Pope Francis**: It’s possible; I’m not speaking about that—I can’t—but it’s possible. Because all religions must be respected, but there is a distinction between religion and sect. Religion is universal, whatever it may be. A sect is restrictive; it's a small group that always has a different agenda. Thank you, and my compliments to your country!

**Francisca Christy Rosana (Tempo Media Group)**

*Thank you, Pope Francis. People in Indonesia, not just Catholics, have been eagerly awaiting your visit for a long time. My questions are these: Did you know the country still struggles with its democracy? How do you see this, and what is your message for us? Also, Indonesia faces issues like Papua New Guinea, where extractive industries benefit only oligarchs while local and indigenous populations receive no benefit. What are your thoughts, and what can we do?*

**Pope Francis**: This is a common problem in developing nations. That’s why it’s important, as the Church’s Social Doctrine says, to ensure communication between different sectors of society. You said Indonesia is a developing country, and one area that perhaps needs development is the social relationship. I enjoyed my visit; it was beautiful!

**Matteo Bruni:** Your Holiness, the press from Papua New Guinea followed your journey closely, but unfortunately, they couldn’t send a journalist on the flight. I’d like to ask if there’s anything you want to share about Papua New Guinea, especially Vanimo, which seems to be a place you personally wanted to visit.

**Pope Francis**: I liked the country and saw a strong, developing nation. I wanted to go to Vanimo to meet a group of priests and nuns from Argentina who work there, and I saw a very beautiful organization. In all the countries, art is highly developed: dance and poetic expression… But the artistic expression in Papua New Guinea, and in Vanimo, was impressive. This impressed me deeply. The missionaries go deep into the forest to work. I liked Vanimo and the country as a whole.

**Stefania Falasca (Tianouzhiku)**

*Good evening, Holy Father. We’ve just come from Singapore, where the population is predominantly Chinese, and it’s a model of peaceful coexistence. Regarding peace, I’d like to know your thoughts, especially given Singapore’s proximity to mainland China, on China’s efforts to achieve a ceasefire in conflict regions like Gaza. In July, the Beijing Declaration was signed to end Palestinian divisions. Could there be areas of cooperation on peace between China and the Holy See? And lastly, we’re approaching the renewal of the agreement between China and the Holy See on the appointment of bishops. Are you satisfied with the results and dialogue so far?*

**Pope Francis**: Regarding the last point, yes, I’m pleased with the dialogues with China. The results are good. Even for the appointment of bishops, things are progressing with goodwill. I’ve spoken with the Secretariat of State, and I’m happy with how things are going. As for China, I see China as an “*ilusión*” (aspiration, ed.), meaning I would like to visit China. It’s a great country, and I admire and respect China.

It’s a country with an ancient culture, a capacity for dialogue to understand each other that goes beyond the different systems of government it has had. I believe China is a promise and a hope for the Church. Collaboration is possible, and certainly for conflicts. Cardinal Zuppi is working in this area, and he has contacts with China.

**Anna Matranga (CBS News)**

*Your Holiness, you have always spoken in defence of the dignity of life. In Timor-Leste, which has a high birth rate, you said you felt life pulsing and exploding with so many children. In Singapore, you defended migrant workers. With the US elections coming up, what advice would you give a Catholic voter faced with a candidate who supports ending a pregnancy and another who wants to deport 11 million migrants?*

**Pope Francis**: Both are against life: the one that throws out migrants and the one that kills children. Both are against life. I can’t decide; I’m not American and won’t go to vote there. But let it be clear: denying migrants the ability to work and receive hospitality is a sin, a grave sin. The Old Testament speaks repeatedly of the orphan, the widow, and the stranger—migrants. These are the three that Israel must care for. Failing to care for migrants is a sin, a sin against life and humanity.

I celebrated Mass at the border, near the diocese of El Paso. There were many shoes from migrants, who ended poorly there. Today, there is a flow of migration within Central America, and many times they are treated like slaves because people take advantage of the situation. Migration is a right, and it was already present in Sacred Scripture and in the Old Testament. The stranger, the orphan, and the widow—do not forget this.

Then, abortion. Science says that at one month after conception, all the organs of a human being are present. Everything. Having an abortion is killing a human being. Whether you like the word or not, it’s murder. The Church is not closed-minded because it forbids abortion; the Church forbids abortion because it kills. It is murder; it is murder!

And we need to be clear about this: sending migrants away, not allowing them to grow, not letting them have life is something wrong, it is cruelty. Sending a child away from the womb of the mother is murder because there is life. And we must speak clearly about these things. “No, but however...” No “but however.” Both things are clear. The orphan, the stranger, and the widow—do not forget this.

**Anna Matranga (CBS News)**

*In your opinion, Your Holiness, are there circumstances in which it is morally permissible to vote for a candidate who is in favour of abortion?*

**Pope Francis**: In political morality, it is generally said that not voting is ugly, it's not good. One must vote. And one must choose the lesser evil. Which is the lesser evil? That lady or that gentleman? I don’t know; each person must think and decide according to their own conscience.

**Mimmo Muolo (Avvenire)**

*There is a risk the Gaza conflict will spill over into the West Bank. There was an explosion a few hours ago that killed 18 people, including some UN workers. What are your feelings at this moment, and what would you say to the warring parties? Is there the possibility that the Holy See could mediate to achieve a ceasefire and the long-for peace?*

**Pope Francis**: The Holy See is working on it. Let me tell you something: I call Gaza daily; there’s a parish there, and within its school are 600 people—Christians and Muslims—living as brothers and sisters. They tell me horrible stories, difficult things.

I can’t say whether this war is excessively bloody, but when you see the bodies of children killed, when you hear that schools are bombed because guerrillas might be inside, it’s horrifying. It’s horrible, it's horrible.

It’s sometimes said that this is a defensive war, but sometimes I believe that it’s a war… too much, too much. I apologize for saying this, but I don’t see steps being taken toward peace.

For example, in Verona, I had a very beautiful experience. A Jewish man, whose wife had died in a bombing, and a man from Gaza, whose daughter had died, both spoke about peace, embraced each other, and gave a testimony of fraternity. I will say this: fraternity is more important than killing one another. Fraternity, shaking hands. In the end, whoever wins the war will find a great defeat. War is always a defeat, always, without exception. And we must not forget that. This is why everything done for peace is important. And I want to say something, this may be a bit of me getting involved in politics: I am very, very grateful to the King of Jordan. He is a man of peace. King Abdullah is a good man.

**Lisa Weiss (ARD)**

*Holy Father, during this trip, you spoke very openly about the problems in each country, not just the beauties. For this reason, we were wondering why you haven’t addressed the issue that Singapore still has the death penalty?*

**Pope Francis**: It's true; it didn’t come to mind. The death penalty doesn't work. We need to eliminate it, slowly. Many countries have the law but do not carry out the sentence. The United States is the same... But the death penalty must be stopped. It’s not right; it’s not right.

**Simone Leplatre (Le Monde)**

*Your Holiness, first of all, thank you for this fascinating journey. In Timor-Leste, you mentioned young victims of sexual abuse. Obviously, we thought of Bishop Belo. In France, we have a similar case with Abbé Pierre, the founder of Emmaus, who was elected as France's most beloved personality for several years. In both cases, their charisma made it more difficult to believe the accusations. I would like to ask: What did the Vatican know about Abbé Pierre? And what can you say to the victims and the general public who find it hard to believe that someone who did so much good could also have committed crimes? And speaking of France, we would also like to know: will you be in Paris for the inauguration of Notre-Dame in December?*

**Pope Francis**: I'll answer the last question: I will not go to Paris; I will not go to Paris. As for the first question, you’ve touched on a very painful and delicate point. These are good people, people who did good, like Abbé Pierre. With all the good done, it’s discovered this person is a serious sinner. This is our human condition.

We must not say: let’s cover it up so it won’t be seen. Public sins are public and must be condemned. For example, Abbé Pierre was a man who did a lot of good but was also a sinner. We must speak clearly about these things and not hide them. The fight against abuse is something we all must engage in. And not only against sexual abuse but all types of abuse: social abuse, educational abuse, manipulating people's minds, taking away their freedom.

In my opinion, abuse is demonic because it destroys the dignity of the person. All forms of abuse try to destroy who we are: the image of God. I’m glad when these cases come to light.

I'll tell you something I may have mentioned before: five years ago, we had a meeting with the presidents of the Episcopal Conferences about sexual abuse and other forms of abuse. We had a very well-done statistic, I believe from the United Nations: 42-46% of abuse is given (happens, ed.) in the family or neighbourhood... In conclusion, sexual abuse of children, of minors, is a crime and a disgrace.

(...)

One thing I didn’t answer: what did the Vatican know about Abbé Pierre? I don’t know when the Vatican learned about it; I don’t know. I don’t know because I wasn’t here, and it never occurred to me to investigate this, but certainly after his death, it became known, but before, I don’t know.

**Elisabetta Piqué (La Nación)**

*First of all, thank you for this beautiful journey to the ends of the earth. It has been the longest of your pontificate. Speaking of long visits, many colleagues have asked me: will we go to Argentina? That's the first question: will we go to Argentina or not? The second question: in Venezuela, the situation is dramatic. In these days while you were traveling, the theoretically-elected president had to go into exile in Spain. What message would you give to the people of Venezuela?*

**Pope Francis**: I haven’t followed the situation in Venezuela, but the message I would give to the leaders is to engage in dialogue and seek peace. Dictatorships are of no use and always end badly, sooner or later. Read the history of the Church... I would say that the government and the people must do everything possible to find a path to peace in Venezuela. I can’t give a political opinion because I don’t know the details. I know that the bishops have spoken, and their message is good. As for going to Argentina, it’s still undecided. I would like to go; it's my country. I would like to go, but nothing has been decided yet. There are several things that need to be resolved first.

**Elisabetta Piqué (La Nación)**

*If you go, could there be a stopover in the Canary Islands?*

**Pope Francis**: You’ve read my mind, right? I’m thinking about going to the Canary Islands, because there are situations with migrants arriving by sea, and I would like to be close to the leaders and the people there.

**Josie Bonifasius Susilo (Kompas.id)**

*Thank you, Father. Some countries are beginning to distance themselves from their commitments to the Paris Agreement for economic reasons, especially following the pandemic. Several countries are hesitant to transition to green energy and away from fossil fuels. What do you think of these issues?*

**Pope Francis**: I think the climate issue is serious, very serious. Since the Paris Agreement (COP21 in 2015, ed.), which was the peak, the climate meetings have been declining. There’s a lot of talk, but little action. That’s my impression. I’ve addressed this in two documents: *Laudato si’* and *Laudate Deum*.

**Matteo Bruni: We thank His Holiness.**

**[Pope Francis:]** Thank you, everyone, keep going forward and stay courageous! Let’s hope they feed us now! (laughter).