



Rome, 13-14 February 2016

To the participants in the Latin-American meeting “Using the Encyclical *Laudato si’* to Defend our Territorial Rights, our Land and our Forests”:

In the name of the *Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace*, I extend fraternal greetings to the indigenous communities, the popular movements and human rights organizations gathered at San Cristobal de las Casas for this Latin-American meeting, during which you will work on how to care for and share our common home.

We are aware of your efforts to defend your rights to your land in your territory and to its forests, now threatened by a system that idolizes money and respects neither the dignity of persons nor the fragility of the planet. We hope that your reflections will be fruitful and lead to constructive actions to face these numerous challenges. We hope that the encyclical *Laudato si’* of Pope Francis will, as you have pointed out, be a valuable contribution to the work that you are undertaking.

In this respect, I would like to reiterate what I said to our second World Meeting of Popular Movements in July 2015: “The poor have organized themselves to counter social exclusion, scandalous inequality and the degradation of their environment. In this way, you have created movements not only to protest against injustice, but also to take your own initiative and resolve problems of access to housing, land and work – *Techo, Tierra y Trabajo*, for which neither States nor the market have solutions. Despite your insecurity, you are tilling the land, building houses and creating jobs. In these processes, the Church wants to join hands with you so that, every day, your social cooperatives, neighbourhood councils, peasant and indigenous communities are strengthened, and more opportunities and better conditions are provided for the integral development of the excluded as individuals, families and peoples”.

The present time is particularly difficult. We live with the globalization of indifference marked by the technocratic paradigm. We keep on witnessing persistent violations of human and social rights throughout the planet. Yet at the same time we detect hope on the horizon. All people are looking for a beneficial change. The indigenous people -- displaced and threatened and hindered by certain models of "progress" that do not provide for the dignity of everyone -- can share with the entire world the valuable example of life in harmony with nature. This lights the way for the change that we need.

Expressing the Church’s closeness to each of you, I urge and encourage you on your way. May God our Father give you the strength to continue to struggle for land, housing and work in defence of peace and of the mother earth.

Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson, President  
Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace