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**VISIT OF HIS EMINENCE CARD. FILONI TO ZAMBIA**

7-10 NOVEMBER 2016

**Opening of the National Catholic Forum, Lusaka, Zambia**

*Brief Introductory Address*

Wednesday, 9 November 2016

Your Excellency, the Nuncio to Zambia,  
Your Excellencies, the Bishops of the Episcopal Conference of Zambia,  
Esteemed members of the Association of Clergy and the Association of Religious,  
Dedicated priests, Religious and lay faithful,  
Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

**1. Greeting:** I am delighted to be here at the Official Opening of the National Catholic Forum to give you my support and encouragement as you discuss important issues involving the life and mission of the Church here in Zambia. Being sent by Our Holy Father Pope Francis as His Special Envoy to Malawi on the occasion of the Consecration of the Cathedral in Karonga afforded me the opportunity and privilege to draw near to your Church as well. I have the unique honor of conveying to all of you the greeting and Apostolic Blessing of Pope Francis, who is near to you today through me. As Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, I would like to thank each of you individually for the cordial welcome and for your dedicated service to the Church's mission of evangelization.

**2. Theme: 125th Anniversary of Evangelization in Zambia:** As Pope Francis pointed out during the *Ad Limina* Visit of the Bishops of Zambia to Rome in 2014, "It is at once evident how plentiful the spiritual harvest in your vast land is – blessed with Catholic-run clinics, hospitals and schools, many parishes alive and growing across Zambia, a wide diversity of lay ministries, and substantial number of

vocations to the priesthood.”<sup>1</sup> Through the missionary impulse of the Holy Spirit, the seeds of the faith were first brought here to Zambia by the White Fathers and Jesuit Fathers. Indeed, small seeds were already present in the culture and customs, such that today the faith has entered into the life of many here. What a joy it is to be here with you in the midst of your Jubilee Celebration of 125 years of Catholicism in Zambia! Today, we remember the tireless efforts of Fr. Van Oosten, M.Afr., and his confreres who, while battling malaria and poor living conditions, found a suitable place to establish the first mission, which they successfully did in 1891 at Mambwe-Mwela. Following the lead of the first missionary fathers, many dedicated men and women have continued the work of evangelization here in Zambia up to the present day. Therefore, we thank God today since “despite the sometimes painful meeting of ancient ways with the new hope that Christ the Lord brings to all cultures, the word of faith took deep root, multiplied a hundredfold, and a new Zambian society transformed by Christian values emerged.”<sup>2</sup> You are indeed blessed with a Christian society here. However, I urge you to remain vigilant in not allowing forms of syncretism to dilute the authentic truth of Jesus Christ as taught by the Catholic Church.

As you gather to discuss the state of pastoral life here in Zambia, remember to entrust yourselves and the work of evangelization in this land to the care of our Blessed Lord. This **trust in the Lord** is especially needed in light of the challenges facing your beloved Country at this time: stressed agricultural production because of drought, unemployment, the resulting poverty felt by many, the terrible affliction of HIV/AIDS and malaria and the struggle to overcome tribal divisions. Do not be discouraged for the Lord is with you every step of the way and will continue to use you to make known the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

Finally, I encourage you to remain rooted in your life of **prayer**. The joy of the Gospel grows from and is renewed by a personal

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, *Address to the Bishops of the Episcopal Conference of Zambia*, Monday, 17 November 2014.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

encounter with Jesus Christ, which results in a change of life and renewed desire to share the love of Christ with others. In fact, joy, by its nature, always wants and needs to be shared. “For if we have received the love which restores meaning to our lives, how can we fail to share that love with others?” (EG, n. 8).

**3. Conclusion:** Brothers and sisters, the Church here is still young but certainly growing. May your efforts today and always produce fruit in vocations and in the effective proclamation of the Gospel. As I stated earlier, the Holy Father is near to you and assures you that you are an essential part of the Church of God. You are at the heart of the Church. Therefore, continue to intensify your efforts to promote pastoral work and evangelization, exhorting the young to seek Gospel ideals, forming them to create authentic Christian families founded on the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony as an indissoluble and permanent institution. I now entrust each of you and the work you are about to undertake to the maternal protection of Our Lady of Africa. May the Holy Spirit, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the African Martyrs, strengthen in you the desire to serve God and one another. We remain always united in prayer. God bless you!