

His Holiness Pope Francis
Apostolic Palace
00120 Vatican City State, EUROPE

Amsterdam, November 30th 2014

Highly Esteemed Pope Francis,

Very soon it will be Christmas again, the celebration of peace for the whole Creation. Unfortunately in the lives of many of our fellow creatures there will be no peace at all this Christmas. Many people suffer from war, terror, exploitation, poverty and hunger and hundreds of thousands of people had to leave their homes and became refugees. Quite rightly the church provides help for the poor and people in need.

With this letter however, we would like to bring to notice the fate of our fellow creatures the animals. The choice for Francis as papal name in honour of Saint Francis of Assisi who showed compassion with all living creatures makes us very hopeful that compassion with animals may be part of your pontificate. We would like to raise awareness for the fact that animals can feel pain and fear and joy just like human beings although they express themselves in different ways. Animals are sensitive creatures which have each their own characteristics and their own intrinsic qualities.

For these reasons it is for us difficult to understand that the celebration of Christmas induces many people to eat large amounts of meat of specially for this occasion exploited and killed animals. Particularly turkeys, rabbits, chickens and pigs which are being kept in appalling conditions and lead miserable lives in factory farms. Not only these animals suffer for the Christmas dinner as well the animals that are being hunted like deer, boar, hare, pheasants, rabbits and many more. Often they are hit but not killed and suffer pain and stress for a long time or a hunter beats it to death. The same applies to fish, lobsters, crabs and more while they as well are killed in brutal ways. In our opinion all this is irreconcilable to the spirit of Christmas.

It proves to be a small step from cruelty and violence towards animals to violence against human beings. The Russian writer Leo Tolstoy once wrote 'as long as there are slaughterhouses there will always be battlefields'. Also the brother of the American president Obama, who lives near Nairobi noticed that after the young boys in the village started working in a goat slaughterhouse the boys showed an increase in violent behaviour. He said these children get used to blood. It doesn't affect them anymore even if they stab someone. There is a correlation between violence towards animals and violence towards people, both are equally reprehensible.

We feel that especially with Christmas there is no place for ill-treatment, exploitation or killing, neither of people nor of animals. Only than peace can become really true. God's gift of peace and salvation at Christmas was meant for all God's creatures. In Genesis 9 it is said that God made a covenant with mankind and all living creatures of every kind. Psalm 36 mentions: both man and beast you save, O Lord. The range of God's covenant of Grace is all-embracing.

Highly Esteemed Pope Francis, our particularly important request is if you could ask the bishops to communicate to the parishioners to contribute towards a celebration of peace by

not using animals for the Christmas dinner and to use Christmas for reflection on how we can treat animals in a more respectful way. Furthermore we would like to entreat you to refer to this request in your Christmas message since it is broadcasted all over the world. In view of the many possibilities nowadays it is not difficult to prepare a delicious banquet, without the use of animals. This way the celebration of Christmas can truly become a celebration of peace and of reflection on our consumer behaviour of everyday life and in this special way it may bring mankind a step closer to a more peaceful world.

We hope for a positive response and we thank you in advance.
Very Respectfully,

Yours sincerely,

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