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## WORLD ALUMNI/AE CONGRESS, KOLKATA

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*“Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high”*

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It gives me immense joy to come to this great city of Kolkata, the heart of Bengali culture, to participate in this Sixth Congress of the World Union of Jesuit Alumni/ae, the first in this third millennium. To this “Summit of Joy” you have travelled from far and near, from East and West, North and South, from ... (50?) different countries of the world, bringing with you the rich diversity of cultures and professions, to experience the unity of the worldwide family of Jesuit alumni/ae. In greeting and saluting you, I also greet and salute the millions of your fellow alumni/ae who could not come here today but who feel represented through you and united with you in this historic event.

What brings you together is surely not just a romantic sentiment, not merely the nostalgic memory of the past when you were educated in a Jesuit institution; but rather the conviction that your shared *past* has a common *future*, that your *history* of being former students of a Jesuit school or university is also a *prophecy*, that the *privilege* of the good education you received holds out at the same time a *challenge* to reach out to the less privileged.

This is the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Father Pedro Arrupe’s landmark address to the International Congress of Jesuit Alumni at Valencia in Spain. The title of that address, “Men and Women for Others”, has become the capsule formula for what Jesuit alumni/ae propose to be worldwide. Father Arrupe wrote:

Today our prime educational objective must be to form men and women-for-others ... people who cannot conceive of love of God which does not include love for the least of their neighbours; men and women completely convinced that love of God which does not issue in justice for others is a farce. This kind of education goes directly counter to the prevailing educational trend practically everywhere in the world.

The theme of this 6<sup>th</sup> Congress of the World Union of Jesuit Alumni/Alumnae echoes Father Arrupe’s address with a focus upon human dignity. The motto of this congress in the poetic words of Rabindranath Tagore, a Jesuit alumnus, “Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high,” describes a human person whose human dignity is accepted. The fundamental principle upon which the imperative to honour human dignity rests is this: We are all children of God, brothers and sisters, members of one human family, all due respect, esteem and fundamental rights as human persons. Jesuit education, based on the pedagogy of our founder Saint Ignatius of Loyola, is a dynamic of relating to God and at the same time to fellow human beings and to the world around us, in one single movement. Our faith in God, our religion and prayer, are barren and meaningless, unless they open our eyes to our fellow human beings in need. Rabindranath Tagore expresses this same idea powerfully in one of his poems in *Gitanjali*:

Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads!

Whom dost thou worship in this lonely dark corner of a temple with doors all shut?

Open thine eyes and see thy God is not before thee!  
He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the pathmaker is breaking stones.  
He is with them in sun and in shower, and his garment is covered with dust.  
Put off thy holy mantle and even like him come down on the dusty soil!  
Deliverance? Where is this deliverance to be found?  
Our master himself has joyfully taken upon him the bonds of creation; he is bound with us all for ever.  
Come out of thy meditations and leave aside thy flowers and incense!  
What harm is there if thy clothes become tattered and stained?  
Meet him and stand by him in toil and in sweat of thy brow.

The variety of cultures, races, talents with which God has graced the human family provides us with immense riches of diversity, complementing and supporting one another in our shared human experience. The Jesuit educational principle, "*alumnorum cura personalis*" – individual respect, care and concern for each of our students, – flows from the same fundamental principle. And each of you and I, as Jesuit alumni/ae have known the difference this recognition and respect for our human dignity, experienced in our Jesuit education, has made. It supports us and gives us courage as we move into unknown, uncharted areas of study or human endeavour in our professions. For it helps us to know that we are worthy to be respected and taken seriously as we struggle for solutions and seek to implement them for and with others.

The Jesuit institutions in which you studied were often laboratories where students coming from different social, economic, cultural and religious backgrounds tried successfully to live and work in harmony, tolerance and friendship. Even now, among your association members and friends you can count persons of communities different from your own. This experience should now urge you to take up projects that would build bridges among the various communities, to promote inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue, to work for communal harmony and peace. In our world where warring ideologies, ethnic conflicts, religious fundamentalism and intolerance have been causing so much suffering and oppression, I see a special role for Jesuit alumni/ae.

In the light of what I have said, we have a twofold challenge to ensure that all men and women can live in dignity. The first is an attitudinal challenge. Do we really believe that all men and women, – whatever be their country, religion, colour, culture, language, – are our equals, our brothers and sisters? To have such an attitude in both mind and heart is not easy. All of us tend to imbibe prejudices, stereotyping peoples. We then have to work with like minded persons to spread attitudes that see all men and women as equal, as persons who are meant to live with human dignity.

Connected with the attitudinal change is the challenge to see areas in the world where we need to act, areas in the world where human beings are looked down upon, deprived of basic human rights, displaced from their homes, even driven out of their countries. Nowadays we are asked to think globally and act locally. But this is an international congress. Therefore I feel that we should first look at the international situation and see as a world congress, as a worldwide organisation of Jesuit alumni/ae, what impact we can make at the international level. Are international trade and market helping persons in poorer countries to live more human lives? Are the policies of the World Bank helping or hindering development in poorer

countries? What can Jesuit alumni/ae in the first world do? What can Jesuit alumni/ae in the developing countries like India do?

It is easy for Jesuit alumni/ae in the first world to blame poor implementation of governments in developing countries for the situation. It is easy for Jesuit alumni/ae in developing countries to blame policies of the richer nations for the problems of their countries. There are surely weaknesses on both sides and you as Jesuit alumni/ae need to see what you can do, as individuals certainly, but especially as an international body.

Father Arrupe realized the conflicting forces that characterize our world. We have been able to perceive the serious injustices which are building around the world of men and women a network of domination, oppression and abuses which stifle freedom and which keep the greater part of humanity from sharing in the building up and enjoyment of a more just and more fraternal world. And at the same time in associations of men and women, among peoples, there is a growing new awareness, which spurs them on to liberate themselves and to be responsible for their own destiny. When, moved by such legitimate aspirations, people are working hard to better themselves but run into resistances from vested interests, – then anger and resentments arise which can, in time, explode. This is why Pope Paul VI said to the United Nations in his first address to this world body, “If you want peace, work for justice.” Take justice away from love and you destroy love. You do not have love if the beloved is not seen as a person whose dignity must be respected, with all that that implies.

Father Arrupe was quite specific:

Just as we are never sure that we love God unless we love our fellowmen, so we are never sure that we have love at all unless our love issues in works of justice. And I do not mean works of justice in a merely individualistic sense. I mean three things:

*First*, a basic attitude of respect for all men which forbids us ever to use them as instruments for our own profit.

*Second*, a firm resolve never to profit from, or allow ourselves to be suborned by, positions of power deriving from privilege, for to do so, even passively, is equivalent to active oppression. To be drugged by the comforts of privilege is to become contributors to injustice as silent beneficiaries of the fruits of injustice.

*Third*, an attitude not simply of refusal but of counter attack against injustice; a decision to work with others toward the dismantling of unjust social structures so that the weak, the oppressed, the marginalized of this world may be set free.

We are called therefore, as Jesuit former students, to humanize the world. Father Arrupe specifies what this means:

What is it to humanize the world if not to put it at the service of mankind? But the egoist not only does not humanize the material creation, he dehumanizes men themselves. He changes men into things by dominating them, exploiting them, and taking to himself the fruit of their labour.

The tragedy of it all is that by doing this the egoist dehumanizes himself. He surrenders himself to the possessions he covets; he becomes their slave — no longer a person self-possessed but a un-person, a thing driven by his blind desires and their objects.

The downward spiral of ambition, competition, and self-destruction twists and expands unceasingly, with the result that the egotist is chained ever more securely to a progressive, and progressively frustrating, dehumanization.

How escape from this vicious circle? Clearly, the whole process has its root in selfishness — in the denial of love. But to try to live in love and justice in a world whose prevailing climate is selfishness and injustice, where egoism and injustice are built into the very structures of society — is this not a fruitless undertaking?

Evil is overcome only by good, hate by love, selfishness by generosity. It is thus that we must sow justice in our world. To be just, it is not enough to refrain from injustice. One must go further and refuse to play its game, substituting love for self-interest as the driving force of society. Such was the teaching of Jesus, whose life and message inspired Saint Ignatius of Loyola, Founder of the Jesuit Order. Such also is the fundamental message of great teachers like Gandhi and Tagore; the inspiration of the life and service of committed people like Mother Teresa of Kolkata. “Fine sounding words,” you may say, but how do we get this principle of justice through love down to the level of reality, the reality of our daily lives? By cultivating in ourselves three attitudes:

First, a firm determination to live much more simply, as individuals, as families, as social groups; and in this way to stop short, or at least to slow down, the expanding spiral of social competition. Let us have men and women who will resolutely set themselves against the tide of our consumer society. Men and women who, instead of feeling compelled to acquire everything that their friends have will do away with many of the luxuries which in their social setting have become “necessities,” but which the majority of humankind must do without. And if this produces surplus income, well and good; let it be given to those for whom the necessities of life are still luxuries beyond their reach.

Second, a firm determination to draw no profit whatever from clearly unjust sources. Not only that, but going further, to diminish progressively our share in the benefits of an economic and social system in which the rewards of production accrue to those already rich, while the cost of production lies heavily on the poor.

Third, by solidarity with our less fortunate brothers and sisters. Solidarity is learned through “contact” rather than through “concepts.” When the heart is touched by direct experience, the mind may be challenged to change. Personal involvement with innocent suffering, with the degradation and injustice that others suffer is the catalyst for solidarity which then gives rise to intellectual inquiry, reflection and action.

Stepping down from our own posts of power would be too simple a course of action. Ordinarily it merely serves to hand over the entire social structure to the exploitation of the egotistical. Here precisely is where we begin to feel how difficult is the struggle for justice. Here it is that your Jesuit Alumni Counsellors can assist you in the process of finding God’s Will even in confusing circumstances, through a great gift we have received from our founder, Saint Ignatius. I refer to the Ignatian discernment. This is a process that helps to free us to find God’s plan for us and can bring us to freely choose the greater good for ourselves and all God’s children.

How can we measure our success or failure? One way is to look at the goal of Jesuit Education. The pursuit of each student’s intellectual development to the full measure of God-given talents rightly remains a prominent goal of Jesuit education. Its aim has never been simply to get a store of information or prepare for a job, though these are important in themselves and useful to emerging leaders. The ultimate aim of Jesuit education is, rather,

that full growth of the person, which leads to action. This goal of action, based on sound understanding and enlivened by reflection, urges students to self-discipline and initiative, to integrity and accuracy. At the same time, it judges slipshod or superficial ways of thinking unworthy of the individual and, more important, dangerous to the world he or she is called to serve.

It is clear, then, that we can effectively evaluate our response to the call of the Society of Jesus to our alumni/ae only in terms of what they have done, not in terms of rhetorical expressions or wishes. Saint Ignatius clearly teaches us that love is measured in deeds, not words.

What have Jesuit alumni/ae done since 1973, the “Men-and-Women- for-Others” Congress? After some initial misunderstandings, we can point to a number of truly encouraging developments. Let me mention but a few of the many outstanding concrete works begun by Jesuit former students in response to the call to greater sensitivity to human dignity and justice.

They have brought several social projects to fruition:

establishing free medical clinics, building schools, homes and social centres for less fortunate families in India and Nepal;

courageously working for peace in Colombia, often in the midst of tense and dangerous situations;

initiating outreach projects for the poor and for the human rights of native people in Australia;

organising free legal service in Hong Kong to assist Vietnamese asylum seekers who were frequently rejected without due legal process, and in Brazil and Ireland to provide *pro bono* help for people in difficult circumstances,— refugees, street people, and other marginalised groups;

involving themselves actively in projects for poor families, native peoples, the aged and the infirm, through the Jesuit Volunteer Corps and the International Jesuit Volunteer Corps of the United States.

We have witnessed the pioneering initiatives in twinning relationships in the generous personal and financial services offered by the Jesuit Alumni of Britain to the people of Lithuania and of the former Yugoslavia during the desperate days of war and thereafter;

and the twinning efforts of the Italian Federation of Jesuit Alumni in their generous outreach to the people of Albania.

In addition, large numbers of alumni/ae serve on Boards of Jesuit schools, colleges and universities, and it goes without saying that very many Jesuit educational institutions could not offer their services without the financial support generously offered by our former students.

Truly many, many alumni have taken Father Arrupe’s challenge to heart in action for human dignity and justice. Some, however, have yet to begin such corporate service.

For all of the above, and for all your efforts on behalf of your brothers and sisters locally and throughout the world, I thank you sincerely.

Many advances have been made possible by relatively recent developments in alumni/ae federations and especially in the World Union of Jesuit Alumni/ae. Within the last decade more functional structures have been put into place enabling your President to work with the Council of the World Union in advancing clarity of purpose, real works of justice and more effective participation by alumni/ae from all parts of the world. You have

demonstrated your universality by formalizing rotation of these congresses around the world. You have realistically addressed the need for regular financial support to make the publications and the works of your World Union possible. You are working to make your presence with advocacy for human dignity and the need of the poor more effective in regional and international assemblies. Much of this is due to the excellent leadership you have selected in Dr. Ciro Cacchione and then Mr. Fabio Tobon and the Council of the World Union. I know from personal experience how generous and committed Dr. Cacchione and Mr. Tobon have been. You have experienced the visits and encouragement of Mr. Tobon in your own countries. This is important in effecting union of minds and hearts. I join you in thanking your leaders for wonderful service. And I trust that you will continue to select leaders truly based on their demonstrated selfless service as dedicated men and women for others.

All of you have done so many things well. I thank God for you. But as you look to the future I ask that you consider and act on the principles I recalled to you earlier in this address. Concretely, I ask that you place emphasis upon:

1) Being open to grow. A wise man has said that, “A person must grow or die.” We need ongoing programs of reflection, ongoing education and formation which open us to apply the values and principles earned as youngsters in Jesuit schools to the challenging realities of the present moment.

2) Deciding to act. Projects for refugees, for the poor, for human dignity in all its ramifications are growing among our former students. But in addition to these excellent works, I ask you to raise your corporate voice at the regional, national and international levels. Jesuit Alumni need to speak out corporately – as associations, as federations, confederations and as the World Union against the abuses that destroy human dignity. I understand that you will address some of these areas in your focus sessions — business ethics/abuse of moral standards that perpetuate and widen the gap between rich and poor—empowerment to women and those dispossessed by bigotry and cultural systems—systemic inequalities in educational opportunity—exclusion of migrants—oppression of indigenous people. Such key concerns are not limited to one or other nation or region of the world. They arise almost everywhere and challenge us all to cry out for a world that respects human dignity in all of God’s children. Failure to achieve a hearing in the halls where key decisions are taken that affect us all would be a serious missed opportunity which could challenge our very mission as Jesuit alumni/ae – men and women for others. Settling into complacent nostalgia is unworthy of anyone who is a Jesuit alumnus/a.

3) Bringing Younger Alumni/ae into active participation in your associations. In many parts of the world the typical pattern of our graduates is that after completing their studies we do not hear from them for years until they are relatively well established. This is not a good situation. As young people move into their first steps in professional life and as they begin to have families, they experience challenges to many of the ideals held up to them in Jesuit schools. Uneasy compromises often result that can inhibit a young person’s full growth. It is at this time that programmes concerning ethics in professional life, mature attitudes towards family and civic responsibilities, and the like can be offered by Alumni Associations as relevant ongoing educational opportunities for growth. And from the associations’ point of view, the fresh ideas and energies young alumni can bring will only strengthen your effectiveness.

If you are looking for a concrete plan of action, you may want to decide on promoting further the proposal discussed at the World Congress in Sydney: that alumni/ae set up a bank of experts consisting of both alumni/ae and like minded persons. So there would be a bank of doctors, of lawyers, of journalists, of teachers, of builders, of economists, of business persons, of government officers. These would be available to be of service in their respective fields when necessary. We have a very large number of talented alumni/ae often in important positions in their professions, in business and in government. If this talent is tapped and pooled, Jesuit alumni/ae associations will make a real difference in their locality, in their state, in their country.

I believe that much more can be done to exploit the potential for greater communication among alumni/ae associations and with society in general. First of all we have to strengthen communication among ourselves. How can Jesuits and alumni/ae associations better collaborate? How can alumni/ae associations work together on a national and international level? As an international body, you surely want to do more than just coming together once every six years. You will be electing representatives to the World Union. You will elect members in whom you have faith that they will act on the international level. You also will be pledging your support to their efforts. On the international and national levels, where many conflicting voices are raised, very often the voice of sanity and of justice is not heard because we do not speak up. If you are really an international organisation, then your voice should be heard in the world forum.

I will do my part in fostering assistance to you in this effort through the appropriate secretariats at our Jesuit Curia in Rome and by urging greater Jesuit involvement at the level of large geographic regions with those who work in education, social ministries, refugee services and spirituality. We Jesuits are committed to be for and with you in these efforts.

And if you feel a bit uneasy today – about how you can ever measure up to the challenge of your responsibilities as parents, as citizens, as men and women of faith for others, – know that you do not stand alone! But know, also, that for every doubt there is an affirmation that can be made.

For the ironies of Charles Dickens' time are with us even now. "It was the worst of times, the best of times, the spring of hope, the winter of despair." And I am personally greatly encouraged by what I sense as a growing desire on the part of many in countries around the globe to pursue more vigorously the ends of Jesuit education which, if properly understood, will lead you to unity, not fragmentation; to faith, not cynicism; to respect for life and human dignity not the raping of our planet; to responsible action based on moral judgment, not to timorous retreat or reckless attack.

I'm sure you know that the best things about any school are not what is said about it, but what is lived out by its Alumni. The ideal of Jesuit education calls for a life of intellect, a life of integrity, and a life of justice and loving service to our fellow men and women and to our God. This is — a call to growth, a call to life. Who will answer? Who if not you? When if not now?

May God bless you on your way!  
Thank you for your kind attention.