**International Women’s Day event - Australian Embassy, ​​8 March 2021**

**Dr Francesca Di Giovanni, Under-Secretary for Multilateral Sector - Secretariat of State - Section for relations with States – Speech**

Eminence, Excellencies, dear friends,

I thank you for this invitation to join you today in this celebration of International Women's Day.

We are living through a period of great doubts and challenges, worldwide and in the Church, a time also of extraordinary changes. The pandemic has affected over 115 million people, and there is still no end in sight, with heavy suffering. We only know in part what serious consequences this has on the lives of women and girls, but I’ll leave this topic to Sr Alessandra Smerilli.

This situation has caused great changes in the styles and conditions of life, in relationships between people and between States. Many of these changes are likely to last for a long time and likely to mark the guidelines for future actions.

Besides a widespread stop to circulation and relationships, with a multiplication of digital connections and a deepening of the social and economic divide, there is also a cultural and social change at all levels occurring rapidly, which presents problematic aspects, but also urges us to understand its possibilities and opportunities, as signs of this time. As Christians we must know how to interpret them, in order to understand how we can best work with and within our society.

The pandemic has aggravated previously existing problems, with the addition of new ones. If we think that, since the beginning of the spread of the virus, which has caused over two and a half million deaths, other 7 million people have died of hunger, while with the amount of wasted food, 2 billion people could be fed. No previous conflict has been solved: terrorist attacks, violence, abuse, violation of human rights, depredation of the natural environment all continue, along with the large numbers of refugees and innocent victims, especially women and children. Problems that the international community proves to be increasingly incapable of facing and solving, trapped in ideological, commercial, geo-political and military interests.

Faced with these situations, Pope Francis, from the day of his election, has indicated the key to a "path of fraternity", a fraternity that includes solidarity, but is a more inclusive concept:

“While solidarity is the principle of social planning that allows unequal people to become equals, fraternity is what allows equals to be different people. Fraternity allows people who are equal in their essence, dignity, freedom, and in their fundamental rights, to participate differently in the common good according to their capacity, their life plan, their vocation, their work or their charism of service."

In my opinion, this has a lot to do with the innate attitude in women, who are naturally inclined to see at the same time the necessary equality of people and their different ability to contribute to the common good, looking for original ways to overcome the inevitable obstacles to the bond that unites us in the one human experience.

Last year marked the 25th anniversary of the 4th World Conference on Women. At that time, I had recently started at the *Section for Relations with* *States* within the *Secretariat of State* and was thrilled to take part in the preparations for this Conference, with the aim of improving the situation of women in the world. Much has been achieved since then and today there is a greater awareness in our societies of the need to fully integrate women in all the various fields, where their contribution to building a civilization of love is fundamental.

This work, however, is not yet finished and much, perhaps too much, remains to be done. And we hope that today's polarization on particular issues, on which there is clearly no consensus, does not prevent us from realizing the urgent need to focus on the suffering of so many women trapped in dramatic situations of violence or exclusion. Our continued efforts and dedication in this regard are extremely necessary.

An important reform is also underway in the Church, which does not seek the limelight but is decisive and effective. Many aspects of the Second Vatican Council are being resumed and new perspectives concerning the laity are being contemplated. Lay people are increasingly being involved in responsibilities that until a few years ago were reserved to clerics. And, among the laity, there are women.

Everyone, priests and laity, women and men, are invited to take part in this step forward on a path that Pope Francis does not fail to indicate. Our contribution as lay people, baptized, both on the ground and at the institutional level, is therefore increasingly awaited and valued.

On 1 January 2020 Pope Francis said that “Women are a donor and mediator of peace and must be fully associated with decision-making processes. Because when women can pass on their gifts, the world finds itself more united and more at peace. Therefore, a conquest for woman is a conquest for the whole of humanity. "

My appointment to the Secretariat of State as first Undersecretary for the Multilateral Sector of the Section for Relations with States, just fifteen days after these words, clearly illustrates this desire of the Pope, and several "female" appointments have already taken place in the period that followed. We spoke of the appointment of Sister Nathalie Becquart as the first Under-Secretary of the Synod of Bishops. I see such appointments in terms of an involvement in the sincere service to the Church of Christ, without interest and certainly not in terms of power, which would create a kind of female clericalism, which of course no one would want.

Instead, in the Church, the generous and sincere work of all contributes to making it more and more what God thought of it, in his love for each one, as a family of humanity, which he sees destined for unity.

In conclusion, I would like to recall part of Pope Francis’ speech on March 8, 2019: "... I would also like to say something about the irreplaceable contribution of women in building a world that is a home for all. The woman is the one who makes the world beautiful, who guards it and keeps it alive. She brings you the grace that makes things new, the embrace that includes, the courage to give oneself. Peace is a woman. She is born and reborn from the tenderness of mothers. Therefore, the dream of peace is fulfilled by observing woman. (...) brings the dream of love into the world. If we care about the future, if we dream of a future of peace, we need to give space to women ".

Thank you.