



OFFICIAL VISIT OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS | 26.09.2024

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## Speech by Prime Minister Luc Frieden on the occasion of the meeting of His Holiness Pope Francis with national authorities and the population at Cercle Cité.

*Check against delivery*

Holy Father,

It is a great honour for my fellow Luxembourgers and me to welcome you today to the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg in your capacity as head of State, head of the Catholic Church and moral authority recognised the world over.

This is your first visit to our country, 40 years after that of His Holiness Pope John Paul II, and we thank you with all our heart. You are visiting not only the capital of Luxembourg, but also one of the three capitals of the European Union – a crossroads of choice for many Europeans. The presence here today of representatives of the European institutions and of the thousands of people from all over the world in the streets is proof of this.

Luxembourg is a country deeply committed to the principles of international law and a country whose history has been strongly influenced by Judeo-Christian traditions and values.

It is the country of Saint Willibrord, a missionary and true European long before the European Union, who was appointed Bishop of Utrecht in the Netherlands prior to establishing himself in Luxembourg, and who was at the origin of Echternach's magnificent papal basilica and its famous dancing procession, recognised as UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Of course, as we all know, the world, Europe and our country have changed quite a bit since Saint Willibrord's time. But what has not changed, and must never change, is the message of peace, of the love of one's neighbour and of human dignity which is common to all religions and to which all human beings, whether believers or not, should aspire.

The Luxembourg Constitution rightly proclaims, as the first fundamental right, the inviolability of human dignity. We must each of us constantly strive to ensure that this dignity is maintained. And I would like to thank here all those, many of them volunteers, who commit themselves every day, in our country and in other countries, to helping the poorest and most vulnerable.

Our democracy and our society are also characterised by the freedom of conscience, the freedom to manifest – or not – one's philosophical or religious beliefs, but also the freedom not to have any religion imposed upon one. As Prime Minister, I will always ensure that these fundamental principles underlying our democracy are safeguarded and maintained.

While the relations between Church and State have evolved toward a clearer separation, and while the secularisation of our societies cannot be disputed, religions do not exist outside the bounds of society either. They are part of it, and must contribute, in a spirit of mutual respect, to the enrichment of our debates on ethical, societal and environmental issues.



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A society cannot survive without values and principles. Neither in Luxembourg nor in Europe – a Europe that remains a project for peace and common values and that needs to be defended continuously.

Unfortunately, the wars and internal conflicts we are witnessing in numerous countries are at odds with those great principles. It is our duty, as political representatives, to strive every day, here and elsewhere in the world, for peace, democracy, human rights and respect for international law.

We are delighted to welcome you and to listen to your words here in Luxembourg, in this very room which hosted, 70 years ago, the first hearings of the Court of Justice of the European Coal and Steel Community – the forerunner of today's European Union and the starting point for a peace project unprecedented in world history.

Thank you, Your Holiness, for the honour you do to Luxembourg by coming here to share your message with us.

