

Statement of H.E. Msgr. Paul Richard Gallagher,
Secretary of Holy See's Relations with States
following the meeting with H.E. Mr. Zohrab MNATSAKANYAN,
Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia

Yerevan, 9 November 2019

Your Excellency,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Friends,

First of all, I would like to express my sincere thanks to H.E. Mr. Zohrab Mnatsakanyan, Minister of Foreign Affairs, for his words of greeting and for the kind invitation to visit Armenia, that I accepted with pleasure and am accomplishing in these days.

As I already mentioned this morning to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Foreign Affairs a few moments ago, I am pleased to transmit the heartfelt greetings of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Authorities of your country, as well as his assurance of prayers for the harmony, prosperity and peace of the Nation, and for its efforts to promote the conditions which ensure the comprehensive growth of society and each one of its members.

This visit is intended to be a way of expressing the friendship which characterizes our bilateral relations. The diplomatic relations between the Holy See and Armenia were established in May 1992, but the contacts have a much much longer history, especially due to the fact that your country *is the first Christian country in the world.*

With regard to the history of the past few decades, it is worth mentioning the Hospital "Redemptoris Mater" in Ashotzk, built with the generous contribution of Caritas Italy in realization of the desire expressed by the Saint John Paul II and inaugurated in October 1991. Ten years later, in 2001, Saint John Paul II himself visited your country. More recently, in April 2015, Pope Francis celebrated Holy Mass for the faithful of the Armenian rite in Saint Peter's Basilica, which was attended by the highest civil and religious Authorities of

your Nation. In June 2016, Armenia received Pope Francis, who made stops in Yerevan, Etchmiadzin and Gyumri.

On Armenia's part, the highest Authorities of the country, including Presidents and Ministers of Foreign Affairs, have visited the Vatican on several occasions. The same is also true of the religious authorities, in particular the visits made by His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians to John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Pope Francis over the years.

At the same time, I would like to stress that our relationship goes far beyond those specific moments of high level visits. I refer to cooperation in the field of charity and social assistance, cultural projects, frequent bilateral consultations dedicated to current issues affecting the region and also, more widely, the international community. Speaking still more generally, our cooperation is frequently implicit in many other themes which are connected to the defence and promotion of human and Christian values, thanks to the indisputable richness of the Armenian Christian heritage. In this sense, our cooperation continues both with your Government and with the Armenian Apostolic Church. Later today I will pay a courtesy visit to the Holy See of Etchmiadzin and express these words of gratitude to His Holiness Catholicos Karekin II.

With regard to the Catholic Church in Armenia, I wish to assure you that the intention of all the Catholic communities present in Armenia – the Armenian Catholic, Catholics of the Roman rite and those of other rites – is to strive for the well-being of Armenian society as a whole. Our Communities continue to do this through their activities in the spiritual, cultural, educational, charitable and humanitarian fields.

In conclusion, on behalf of the Holy See, I ask the abundant blessings of the Lord on Armenia and its people, who have suffered much over the centuries, and I pray for the human and Christian well-being of your Nation.