



Strasbourg, 25 November 2014

Your Excellency,

As you are honouring this Parliament with an official visit we would like to seize this opportunity to address you as a man of faith and share some of our pressing concerns regarding the state of our planet and humankind.

We are aware of the impact a respected and trustworthy Church can have on issues of global importance. In this regard, we welcome your repeated commitments to make a priority of the fights against rising inequality and poverty and climate change. The Greens even consider these two concerns to be intrinsically connected, with social and environmental inequalities mirroring each other. Our political grouping will always be able to offer support and expertise on these issues. We would also like to express a special appreciation for your decisive action on ending the dubious financial practices that have plagued the Vatican's reputation and which strengthen your credibility.

As you are certainly aware, while strongly committed to the respect of secularism in the political arena, the European Greens also respect all expressions of faith and religious opinion that defend the values of peace, human dignity, social solidarity and individual freedom.

We therefore cannot but remain worried by the position of the Catholic Church as regards women, especially when it comes to their personal freedoms and reproductive rights and their place and role in the Church. We are also gravely concerned by the continuing condemnation of homosexuality, but are encouraged by some of your personal statements on this sensitive topic. We have been profoundly shocked by the scale of the sexual abuses - whether hetero- or homosexual - committed by people ordained by the Catholic Church and by the fact that more often than not they were covered-up by the hierarchy for extended periods of time. This, and the slow and difficult admission of these crimes by the Church aggravated the victims' suffering and delayed their healing process. Nevertheless, we acknowledge your recent efforts to address these dark stains on the Catholic Church's record, and we wholeheartedly encourage you to persist and thus uphold the Christian message of human dignity, justice and tolerance for all.

Given that we share a concern for inequality and the fate of the most deprived, we would like to draw your attention to the increasingly difficult situation of migrants and asylum seekers in most European countries (and beyond). The treatment of these men, women and children in distress, victims in the homes they left and brutally mistreated where they land, is a shameful testimony to the growing selfishness and cynicism that moves the European peoples and their governments further away from their historical commitments to human rights and an open society. We find it unacceptable that the economic crisis and security concerns are used as lazy excuses to justify the organised ignorance of the universality of human rights. Religious or not, there are individuals and civil society organisations, as well as political forces, committed to the defense of these fundamental rights and they deserve all your support and help.

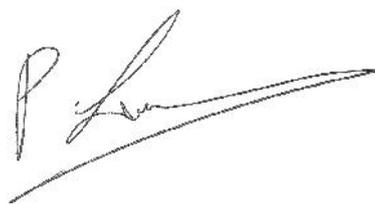
Finally, we wish to express our growing alarm about the global rise of religious bigotry and identity politics, which feed religious tensions and sometimes open conflicts within societies and across borders in the world. We would therefore very much value that you intensify the Church's efforts in favour of global peace and conflict resolution, wherever its voice can be heard and its commandments respected.

Your Excellency, as indicated earlier in this letter, there is much that concerns us in matters pertaining to the Catholic Church, not least the discrepancy between the message of Christ and the deeds of many of his followers. But your election brought us some reasons for hope and we do believe we have a shared and genuine concern for the possible fate of this planet and its inhabitants. We know that, as a King once said, "we must learn to live together as brothers (and sisters, we may add) or perish together as fools." (Martin Luther King)

Very respectfully,



Rebecca Harms



Philippe Lamberts

Co-Presidents
Greens/EFA Group in the European Parliament