HM King Mohammed VI this Saturday welcomed His Holiness Pope Francis to Morocco, where he delivered a speech at the Esplanade of the Hassan Mosque in Rabat, below is the full speech.

“Praise be to God, May peace and blessings be upon the Prophet, His Kith and Kin Your Holiness, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, This is an exceptional day for two reasons. It is exceptional because of the visit of His Holiness Pope Francis. It is also exceptional because it reminds me of the historical visit the late Pope John Paul II paid to Morocco.

Today’s visit falls within the framework of the longstanding relations between Morocco and the Vatican. I was keen to make sure the place and the date of the visit reflect the symbolic depth, the historical significance and the civilizational importance of this Meeting. The place where we are meeting today is an embodiment of openness, passage and cross-cultural fertilization; it is, in itself, a symbol of balance and harmony.

Aptly located where the Bouregreg River meets the Atlantic Ocean, this place is aligned with the Al-Koutoubia Mosque in Marrakech and with the Giralda in Seville – it constitutes a spiritual, architectural and cultural link between Africa and Europe. I also wanted this visit to coincide with the holy month of Rajab – a month that witnessed one of the most iconic episodes in the history of Islam and Christianity.

It was in this month that, at the behest of Prophet Muhammad – may Peace and Blessings be upon Him – Muslims, fleeing persecution, left Mecca to take refuge with the Negus, the Christian King of Abyssinia. This was the first welcoming, during which Islam and Christianity made acquaintance with each other.

Today, we are commemorating that act of getting to know each other, for the sake of the future and that of the coming generations. Your Holiness, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Your Holiness’s visit to Morocco is taking place at a time when the Community of Nations – just like that of all Believers – is facing a number of challenges.

We need to tackle these new ills which feed on treachery as much as on the instrumentalization of the Divine Message by advocating the denial of the Other and similar wicked theories. In a world in search of direction, the Kingdom of Morocco has never stopped proclaiming, teaching and experiencing, on a daily basis, Brotherhood among the Sons of Abraham. This is a founding pillar of the

exceptionally rich diversity underpinning Moroccan civilization.

The symbiotic relationship uniting Moroccans – beyond faiths – is an eloquent example in this regard. This symbiosis is a fact of life in my country. It is reflected by the mosques, churches and synagogues which have coexisted in the cities of the Kingdom since time immemorial.

As King of Morocco and Commander of the Faithful, I am the Guarantor of the free practice of religion. I am Commander of all believers. And, as Commander of the Faithful, I cannot speak of the Land of Islam, as if only Muslims lived there. I am keen to ensure freedom to practise the religions of the Book and I am the guarantor of that freedom. I protect Moroccan Jews as well as Christians from other countries, who are living in Morocco.

Your Holiness, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, I have never ceased to seek God – beyond silence, beyond words and beyond the comfort of dogmas – so that our religions may remain crucial, illuminating bridges, and so that the lessons and messages of the Islamic enlightenment may live on.

Given the reality of today's world, it is clear the dialogue between the Abrahamic religions is insufficient. At a time when paradigms are shifting everywhere and concern all matters, inter-religious dialogue must evolve too. The dialogue centered on tolerance has been going on for a long time now; and yet, it has not achieved its goal. The three Abrahamic religions were not created to be tolerant of one another out of some unavoidable fate, or out of courtesy to one another.

The reason they exist is to open up to one another and to know one another, so as to do one another good: قال تعالى : "يا أيها الناس، إنا خلقناكم من ذكر وأنثى، وجعلناكم شعوبا وقبائل لتعارفوا، إن أكرمكم عند الله أتقاكم"، صدق الله العظيم. "O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other (not that you may despise (each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you". The Word of God is Truth. Radicalism – whether it is motivated by religion or not – is due to failure to know one another, to ignorance of the other, and to ignorance pure and simple.

Knowing one another eliminates radicalism – all types of radicalism. Knowing one another is precisely what is going to help us rise to the challenges of our tormented times. قال تعالى : "لكل جعلنا منكم شرعة ومنهاجا، ولو شاء الله لجعلكم أمة واحدة، ولكن ليبلوكم في

ما آتاكم، فاستبقوا الخيرات”، صدق الله العظيم. “To each among you have we prescribed a law and an open way. If Allah had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but (His plan is) to test you in what He has given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues”. The Word of God is Truth. To tackle radicalism, the solution is neither military nor financial; that solution has but one name: Education.

My plea for education is an indictment of ignorance. It is binary conceptions and the fact of not knowing one another well enough that are threatening our civilizations; it is certainly not religion. That is why, as Commander of the Faithful, I am advocating today that we give back to religion its rightful place in education.

That is why I cannot speak to these young people without warning them against the phenomena of radicalization and of stepping into violence. What all terrorists have in common is not religion, but rather ignorance of religion.

Today, religion should no longer be an alibi for ignorant people, for ignorance or for intolerance. That is because religion is Light; religion is Knowledge; religion is Wisdom. And because religion is Peace, it calls for diverting the energy spent on weapons and other misguided races towards loftier pursuits.

For this reason, I set up the Mohammed VI Ulema Foundation. I have also responded favorably to requests from several African and European countries to take young people from these nations into the Mohammed VI Institute for the training of imams and male and female religious guides.

Your Holiness, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, In my capacity as Commander of the Faithful, I believe, just like the Holy Father, in an active spirituality that seeks to serve the common good.

Spirituality is not an end in itself. Our faith translates into concrete actions. It teaches us to love our fellow human beings and to help them. One fact is essential: God forgives. “إن الله غفور رحيم”. “God is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful”. And since God is mercy, generosity and kindness are at the center of my action.

Because God is love, I have tried to make sure my reign is characterized by closeness to citizens as well as by assistance to the poorest and most vulnerable people. That is the spirit of the National Initiative for Human Development (INDH) which I launched 14 years ago to improve the lives of people in precarious or fragile situations, integrate those who are excluded, put a roof over the heads of the

homeless and kindle faith in a dignified future.

That is also the philosophy behind the immigration and asylum policy which I have instituted and which is fundamentally based on solidarity. It is in line with the Marrakech Compact, which the international community adopted on 10 December 2018.

Your Holiness, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Our meeting attests to a mutually held belief that the values of monotheism contribute to rationalization, to reconciliation and to improving the world order.

As Commander of the Faithful, and just like Your Holiness, I am against all forms of indifference and I wish, in this respect, to salute the courage of the Leaders who do not shy away from the defining questions of our time. I have been following with interest and appreciation Your Holiness's efforts to serve peace in the world, as well as your regular calls to promote education and dialogue, to end violence, to combat poverty and corruption, to tackle climate change – to fight the ills plaguing human societies.

As Commander of the Faithful and as Holy Father, we are called upon to be both idealistic and pragmatic, to be realistic and to set an example. Our messages do not concern our time only; they are eternal. They call upon people to embrace the values of moderation, to fulfil the imperatives of knowing one another and to raise awareness of otherness.

By doing this, Your Holiness, you and I "will speak with one voice" – a voice which is not to be reduced to a mere consensus based on compromise. I see this – in my daily life – as a common message conveyed by Muslims, Christians and Jews to all of humankind.

That is precisely what has brought us together today and what should unite us in the future. Wassalamu alaikum warahmatullah wabarakatuh".