

**Speech at the Lighting of the Christmas Tree and Opening of the Crèche**  
**December 10, 2021**  
**Sister Raffaella Petrini, FSE, Secretary General**

Excellences, Distinguished Authorities, Distinguished Representatives of the Delegations from Peru, from the municipality of Andalo (in Trentino) and from the municipality of Gallio (in Veneto), it is an honour and a joy for me to formally begin my service as Secretary General of the Governorate of Vatican City State on this very occasion, with participation in this very significant ceremony: the inauguration of the Crèche and the lighting of the Christmas tree here in St Peter's Square.

The Crèche and the Christmas tree are signs of hope at a time when the whole world is still struggling to overcome the suffering and uncertainty caused by the pandemic. They invite us to contemplate, as Pope Francis also points out, the nativity of Jesus, and "to set out spiritually, drawn by the humility of the One who became man to meet every man" (cf. *Admirable Signum 1*). As a Franciscan Religious, I cannot help but feel particularly touched by these "signs": by this Christmas scene which St Francis of Assisi was the first to realize in Greccio, making people relive the emotion and joy of the mystery of the Incarnation.

On this special day, I would like also, joining with what has already been expressed by His Excellency Monsignor Fernando Vergez, President of the Governorate, and together with the Vice-secretary General, Advocate Giuseppe Puglisi-Alibrandi, to express my personal gratitude to all those who have collaborated, with such dedication and professionalism, in the creation of the Nativity scene and in the decoration of this beautiful evergreen.

I wish to begin by thanking all the workers, collaborators and employees of the Governorate, the Legal Office, the Infrastructure and Services Directorate, represented here by its director, Rev. Rafael García de la Serrana Villalobos, in particular, the electricians, the staff of the Gardens, the Apostolic Floreria, the Gendarmerie Corps and the Fire Brigade, the service for the Coordination of Events, the colleagues of the Dicastery for Communication, and many others that it is not possible to remember by name, for the generous work, punctual and patient, allowing us to be here tonight. I also warmly thank the band of the Gendarmeria, who accompanied us with its music.

If the Christmas tree represents the natural beauty of the woods that surround the town of Andalo and welcome its population, this year the statues of the crib

make present to all of us the Peruvian community of the village of Chopcca, with its rich cultural and ancestral traditions, offering a glimpse of Andean rural life.

The universal message of friendship, brotherhood and peace that radiates from this square this evening, through the lights of the Christmas tree, is an invitation to gaze upon the scene of the Nativity as a representation of that profound human desire for reciprocity, of care for the fragility and vulnerability which characterizes us all, without exception.

While wishing you all, your families and your communities a Blessed Christmas, I make the words of Pope Francis once again my own, that the Lord who comes may continue to nourish in us that desire, that will "to commit oneself every day concretely to 'forming a community composed of brothers and sisters who welcome one another, taking care of one another'" (cf. *Message for the World Day for Peace 2021*, 9).