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## **Pope in Budapest. Msgr. Tóth (Hungarian bishops): “We are ready to welcome him, looking forward to listening to his words”**

“We are looking forward to welcoming the Holy Father. We are joyfully awaiting to listen to his words.” Msgr. **Tamás Tóth**, Secretary General of the Hungarian Bishops' Conference, describes the general atmosphere in Budapest where Pope Francis will be landing today for his apostolic visit to Hungary on April 28 to 30. Contacted by phone by SIR, the Secretary General said: “The Hungarian people are eagerly anticipating this visit. It is a great honour for us to welcome the Holy Father to Budapest for the second time. His first visit was occasioned by the International Eucharistic Congress. He is now returning for a visit to the country. The people instantly realised that it is extraordinary. Apart from Italy there is no other country that the Holy Father has visited twice, and the Hungarian people are aware of this, regardless of their religious affiliation. In his catechesis for the latest Angelus prayer, the Holy Father said he is looking forward to visiting the country "as a pilgrim, friend and brother of all'.” **In that Sunday Angelus address, Pope Francis spoke about “a journey to the centre of Europe”, “over which the icy winds of war continue to blow.” What is expected on the subject of peace?** Budapest is said to be the city of bridges. And in fact, we chose the bridge as a symbolic image for the logo of this visit. Bridges do not divide, they unite. The bridge is also symbolic of what could possibly be the message of the visit and that we know is important for the Holy Father, namely to focus on what unites us and not on what divides us. **The war has caused the forced displacement of a considerable number of people. How did you tackle this humanitarian emergency?** Hungary borders with neighbouring Ukraine, theatre of a tragic war. Hungary took in large numbers of Ukrainian refugees from the very beginning, and it did so through charitable organisations, both Catholic and of other faiths, and in close cooperation with the national government. In this respect, the Holy Father's meeting with the poor and the refugees at St Elizabeth of Hungary Church - the patron saint of the poor and the forsaken - on Saturday, April 29, is bound to be a very special event. This meeting will also see the presence of a Ukrainian family that will voice the suffering of the Ukrainian people to the Holy Father, as well as their gratitude for the help they have received. **How many people are expected to attend this meeting?** The church can seat 600 people, but we will also try to make room for another 800 in the garden. The words of the Holy Father will be broadcast on giant screens that we installed for the occasion, since the entire visit will be broadcast live on TV. Charitable organisations such as Caritas and the Order of Malta - among the most important in the country - as well as the Community of Sant'Egidio and the Sisters of Mother Teresa, are scheduled to attend, along with all the charities active at local and national level. **The first scheduled meeting of the Pope in Budapest will be with the country's political authorities. What do the people expect from this meeting?** This time it will be a State visit. The Holy Father will be visiting also in his capacity as Head of State, so the first item on his agenda is a meeting with the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister and public dignitaries. Numerous topical issues are on the agenda, ranging from family policies in Hungary - praised by Pope Francis on the return flight to Rome from Bratislava - to the subject of peace. **Will there be a meeting with young people?** Both the local church and the Holy Father dearly wished to organise an event with young people. This resulted in the meeting with some 11,000 young people that will take place in the Papp László Sports Stadium in Budapest on Saturday April 29, where they will welcome the Holy Father. Participants will be arriving from diocese across the country, and from neighbouring countries. A Ukrainian delegation from the Transcarpathia region, located on the border with Hungary, will also attend. And a young man from the Greek-Catholic diocese of Mukachevo, currently pursuing his studies in Hungary with the Jesuits, will offer his testimony. **Will the visit culminate with Holy Mass on Sunday April 30?** The Holy Mass on the fourth Sunday of Easter season will be the highlight of the visit, we expect many people from Hungary and other neighbouring countries to attend. In keeping with tradition, we invited delegations from the Bishops' Conferences of neighbouring

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countries, along with those from the Czech Republic and Poland. Holy Mass is open to all, and anyone can attend without prior registration. From what we know so far, the square will be filled to capacity, and so will surrounding streets. Over 800 priests and seminarians have registered for the concelebration. **Which message are the Hungarian people expecting from Francis?** The motto of Pope Francis' visit to Hungary is "Christ is our future". We expect the Holy Father to offer us an encouraging message to rebuild the future of the Hungarian Church and our country with renewed determination.

M. Chiara Biagioni