

## **Congratulations Address: Religious Freedom is a Fundamental Right of Individuals and Communities**

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Catholic Church Cardinal-Priest (Castries)



Distinguished leaders from around the world, I consider it a privilege to participate in this "Rally of Hope for Religious Freedom" organized by the Universal Peace Federation and Mother Moon. In my country, the Commonwealth of Dominica, in the Caribbean region, I have often met a group of Japanese Volunteers of the Women's Federation for World Peace, a sister organization to the Universal Peace Federation. For twenty-six years, they have been conducting Art classes at our Teachers' Training College and in many schools around the country.

At the same time, they have often held programmes to strengthen family unions. They have also been educating our young people about the benefits of keeping sexual abstinence until marriage. I have attended several International Conferences of the Universal Peace Federation in Brazil, New York, and Japan.

The most memorable Conference I attended was in Nagoya in Japan in October 2019. After that conference, I had the privilege of participating in Kyoto, in an Interfaith Commemoration of the Martyrdom of fifty-two Catholic believers, who had been burnt to death exactly four hundred years ago. It is painful to experience how members of the Universal Peace Federation and the Women's Federation for World Peace are misunderstood by some sections of the media and the general public in Japan.

Pope Francis said: "Religious freedom is a fundamental right which shapes the way we interact socially and personally with our neighbors whose religious views differ from our own." "When individuals and communities are guaranteed the effective exercise of their rights, they are not only free to realize their potential, they also, through their talents and their hard work, contribute to the welfare and enrichment of society as a whole." May God bless us all.