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Pope Francis shakes hands with an Indigenous woman during an audience with people taking part in a workshop jointly sponsored by the Pontifical Academies of Sciences and of Social Sciences on the knowledge of Indigenous peoples and research carried out in the sciences during an audience at the Vatican March 14, 2024. (CNS/Vatican Media)

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The world's cultures, traditions, spiritualities and languages must be acknowledged, respected and protected, especially those of Indigenous peoples, Pope Francis said.

The entire patrimony of human knowledge "should be employed as a means of overcoming conflicts in a nonviolent manner and combating poverty and the new forms of slavery," he said in remarks read by an aide March 14 to participants attending a workshop at the Vatican.

The Pontifical Academies of Sciences and of Social Sciences jointly sponsored a workshop March 14-15 on the knowledge of Indigenous peoples and the work and research being carried out in the sciences.

The workshop aimed "to join these two forms of knowledge for the sake of a more comprehensive, rich and humane approach to a number of urgent critical issues, including climate change, the loss of biodiversity and threats to food and health security," the pope's text said.

The initiative helps acknowledge "the great value of the wisdom of native peoples" and promote integral and sustainable human development, he wrote.

It also represents "an opportunity to grow in
reciprocal listening: listening to Indigenous peoples in order to learn from their wisdom and from their lifestyles, and at the same time listening to scientists in order to benefit from their research," he wrote.

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The workshop "also sends a message to government leaders and to international organizations, encouraging them to acknowledge and respect the rich diversity within the great human family," the pope wrote.

"The fabric of humanity is woven with a variety of cultures, traditions, spiritualities and languages that must be protected, since their loss would represent an impoverishment of knowledge, identity and memory for all of us," he wrote.

To address "the urgent challenges facing the earth, our common home, and the family of peoples," he wrote, "a conversion is required, an alternative vision to the one that is presently driving our world to increased conflict."

"Indeed, open dialogue between Indigenous knowledge and the sciences, between communities of ancestral wisdom and those of the sciences, can help to confront in a new, more integral and more effective way such crucial issues as water, climate change, hunger and biodiversity," Francis wrote.

"God has made us stewards, not masters of the planet," he wrote. Everyone is called to save humanity's common home and preserve the life of future generations as well as to live out "our human call to universal fraternity, freedom, justice, dialogue, reciprocal encounter, love and peace, and to avoid fueling hatred, resentment, division, violence and war."