Rome, 3 May 2021

Prot. N° 21/………

For the kind attention of

**Fr. Biju Michael, Regional of South Asia,**

**Provincials and confreres in India.**

*My dear confreres*

            Receive my greeting full of affection and fraternity. As you can imagine, the news that reaches us, and the more precise information from the Regional Councillor for South Asia, Father Biju, leaves my heart stricken by the suffering of the people in India and by the suffering that you have and the loss of the confreres, as well as the illness of so many Salesians.

And with these words I want to let you know all my closeness, the closeness of the Vicar of the Rector Major and all the Council; the same for the confreres of this community who always think of the mission of the Congregation in the world. I want this to be a manifestation on our part of fraternal affection and great concern for the situation you and your people are experiencing.

Every day I receive news and signals of a national health situation that is increasingly worrying and out of control. I am well aware that it is not the same for all of you; India being a sub-continent, the areas and situations are very different, but on the whole I hear with pain and trepidation the news of deaths and suffering.

Among the areas that are suffering the most are areas where we are intensely present as Salesian communities:

**Kolkatta**, where we have lost a number of confreres to the pandemic, including two young confreres, Fr Agapit and Fr Sanchu, in the recent weeks. Number of confreres are sick with covid in various communities and at least one, I am told is very serious;

The death of the young Salesian Paulus Guria (ING) a few days ago was also very painful.

We are told that **Mumbai** is also one of the areas with the highest concentration of infections.

**The North East and in particular Shillong**, where the Provincial Fr Paul Lunghot is in intensive care with oxygen. Certainly, there are many other communities and urban or rural areas that are particularly exposed to the pandemic and its consequences, in conditions that change from day to day and of which you are aware.

We know about the difficulty of getting medical care, we know that it is a problem shared a little bit all over the country and this makes this time particularly difficult for all of you, your families and those who live in close contact with us, sharing the Salesian Mission and Spirituality.

We know of the difficulty in finding appropriate treatment, especially oxygen, as also reported in the international media; the vaccine still seems to be an answer to this challenge that is not accessible to most; we can imagine the difficulty in moving within the country, even when there are serious reasons involving your loved ones or others affected by the pandemic.

It is not I, dear confreres, who can explain to you what you and your people know very well on a daily basis; it is you who can make us participants in this sad reality. But I would like you to feel strongly my closeness and that of the whole Congregation, of all the confreres and of the Salesian Family throughout the world.

Your response to this global challenge in recent months has been exemplary for the whole Salesian world. You have acted promptly and with great generosity alongside those most in need, multiplying your efforts and initiatives. Unfortunately, the challenge of Covid is so great that what we can do with all our strength cannot stem the wave of suffering and death that this evil brings. Evidence of this is provided by the hundreds of confreres sdb who have lost their lives to the infection since the pandemic began.

Feel supported by our prayers and closeness and know that we have you very much at heart; your pain does not leave us indifferent. This time of pandemic makes our lives difficult; it touches us hard, even to the point of death, but it does not take away the Hope of the Presence of God and of the Mother of God Mary Help of Christians. I ask you to live *this time of ours today with a deep faith. We are the first ones who must witness to the faith even in the midst of difficulties.*

We are in the month of May and I would like to entrust each and every one of you to our Heavenly Mother so that She may sustain your lives, help us all to support your labours with closeness and solidarity.

Take my prayers and my remembrance to your families, to the Salesian Family and to all those who work and share the Salesian mission with us.

Today more than ever I thank the Lord for our beautiful fraternity and communion as sons of Don Bosco and disciples of the Risen Lord Jesus.

With true affection I greet you,

Don Angel Fernández Ártime

*Rettor Maggiore*