



The Holy See

***DISCORSO DI GIOVANNI PAOLO II
AI MEMBRI DEL DIRETTIVO DELL'UNICEF
PER L'AMERICA LATINA ED IL CARIBE****

Giovedì, 12 gennaio 1989

1. I am pleased to meet you, Directors of the United Nations' Children's Fund for Latin America and the Caribbean, accompanied by those in charge of social apostolate for C.E.L.A.M. At the same time, I would like to express my appreciation for the kind greetings expressed to me in the name of UNICEF by the Regional Director, Dr Teresa Albanez Barnola.

The great work of coordination and pursuit of the problems of children which you, as professionals and believers, are fulfilling on that beloved continent is commendable. In this regard it is consoling to see that my message for Lent of 1988, in which I made an appeal to all regarding the tragic problem of infant mortality, was so well received, especially on the part of UNICEF; it was like the "good soil" of which the Gospel speaks, which is bearing fruit in Latin American society.

2. Speaking of the scandalous problem of infant mortality, I said in that Lenten message, that it "claims tens of thousands of victims every day. Children are dying before their birth; others have only a brief and painful existence which is cut short by diseases that could easily be prevented.

"It has been clearly demonstrated that in the most severely poverty stricken countries of the world it is the children who have the highest death rate... A great many children die in their infancy, while the physical and psychological development of others is so seriously affected that their very survival is threatened, and they are at a disadvantage in finding a place for themselves in society.

"The victims of this tragedy are the children who are born in a state of poverty which too often stems from social injustices, as well as their families who do not have the resources they need and who are wounded for ever by the early deaths of their children".

In the face of this tragedy of infant mortality which so cruelly afflicts the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as other developing countries, we are all called to join efforts to preserve life, including life before birth, and to offer all children the resources they need for their physical and spiritual growth, to which every human being has an inalienable right.

3. I am happy to learn that some of the programmes of the Church's social apostolate are being successfully coordinated with the initiatives and activities of UNICEF, for example, among others, the programmes of vaccination, safe drinking water, and adequate nutrition.

It is therefore necessary to work intensely on the "grass roots" level of the family. It is in the family nucleus that, even before a child is born, there should be adequate preparations to receive each child that comes into the world with love, responsibility, and tenderness. Parents of families must be able to procure the formation and indispensable means that will allow them to ensure the complete normal development of their children.

Therefore I once again invite the family community, as well as society in general, to create continuing conditions which will favour still more the healthy growth of children.

Latin America, Continent of hope, in the children who have born and the division, growing up today lies the firm hope of tomorrow!

To you, professionals and apostles of children, I encourage you to continue with untiring enthusiasm in your task of arousing interest and involving all social groups and the various sectors of public life to work for the integral good of children; to maintain and improve ever more a culture of life that respects all the moral principles; to assure children, especially the poorest and most defenceless, the necessary conditions so that they can be fittingly inserted into society.

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