



# The Holy See

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***DISCORSO DI GIOVANNI PAOLO II  
AL SEGRETARIO GENERALE DELL' ORGANIZZAZIONE DELLE  
NAZIONI UNITE, IL SIGNOR JAVIER PÉREZ DE CUÉLLAR\****

*Sabato, 23 novembre 1991*

1. This is not the first time that you have visited me, and I would like to take advantage of this new meeting to assure you once again of the confidence which the Apostolic See places in the United Nations and of the active interest and support which it wants to give, within the limits of its own field of activity.

Since in just a few weeks your mission as secretary-general will come to an end I would like to express to you my great esteem for the work which you have accomplished on behalf of the great causes of humanity within the United Nations during these 10 years of tireless personal devotion.

2. Under your leadership, the Organization has experienced a fortuitous evolution. After a difficult period of financial crisis and many tensions, today it can accomplish its mission with greater hope of success. It has sought to serve the great objectives which were the reason for its founding after the two world wars: to maintain peace in justice, promote human rights and deal with problems which have a global dimension. On the one hand, this has been made possible by a better co-ordination of the various entities notably between the Secretary-General and the Security Council. On the other hand, the overall situation in the world has changed noticeably: the conjunction of powerful interests and opposition between groups of countries which seemed to be insurmountable have been lessened, or have even given way to new forms of co-operation. In a greatly renewed international context in the last few years, there is a more clearly perceived opportunity for a reform of institutions or decision-making mechanisms so that the interdependence of peoples, their interests and responsibilities, may be ever more strongly affirmed.

3. Mr. Secretary-General, you would be the first to emphasize the seriousness of the problems

which urgently need to be confronted with determination in many parts of the world, as well as on the global level. I know that you work with a praiseworthy perseverance so as not to allow the scourges and wounds which affect such a terribly large number of men women and children on the threshold of the Third Millennium to be ignored: poverty, illiteracy, disease, the spread of drug trafficking, the growth of crime, the pollution of the environment, to mention only a few of the more obvious ones.

4. It is to the honour of the United Nations that, since its beginning it has given pride of place to the definition, defence and promotion of human rights. Noteworthy progress has been made and is continuing since the Universal Declaration adopted in 1948. It has further helped in the emergence of bonds between individual rights and those of cultural and spiritual communities, of peoples and nations. One can also better understand how, more than a mere passive protection, it is necessary to allow all the members of the human family to develop and make progress. No longer can one confine an approach to the primary topic of development to the economic level; rather, it is necessary to include in its perspectives the promotion of education, family, culture, and civic responsibilities exercised in freedom: in short, that it is the whole person who is the worthy and responsible subject of development. You know how greatly these concerns deserve the attention of the Church, which seeks to develop her social teaching in this sense. I thank you for having publicly shown the attention which you give the Holy See's social teaching, most recently on the centenary of the Encyclical *Rerum novarum*.

5. Many of the United Nations' initiatives have been taken during your two terms to arouse consciences, deepen reflection, and evoke effective, coordinated measures. I am referring especially to the conferences convoked on the environment and development [1992] and on population [1994]. The Holy See wants to offer its collaboration in these efforts in accordance with its means and in conformity with its mission. It also wants to utilize the points of view which seem essential to it for the protection of the dignity of individuals and peoples, hoping that the specialized organizations will not go so far as to make use of the United Nations' prestige in order to impose policies, especially in the area of population, which would do violence to the freedom and the sense of responsibility of individuals in all regions of the world. The inspiration of international activity in confronting current problems must be the UN's basic idea: the service of peace and justice through the collaboration of all and a better distribution of the world's resources.

6. The world situation not only reveals inequalities in development or the exercise of basic rights; day after day it shows us a tragic set of conflicts in almost all the continents. The language of warfare is heard more often than that of harmony. Quite close to us, for example, a pointless fratricidal war is in progress, dragging whole populations into hardship and desolation. Obviously, I am referring to the fighting taking place in Yugoslavia.

The disturbing stockpiling of arms can only result in their use, as we see quite often. However, I would like to pay homage to and encourage the efforts which the United Nations has made for

progress on the path of disarmament, in the hope that they will be pursued with conviction, that the menacing arsenals will be made unnecessary, and that better use will be made of the economic potential that has been rendered fruitless and of the human energies which have been devoted to such questionable causes.

Mr. Secretary-General, I want to pay tribute here to the persevering activity which you have personally devoted these last years to bring about the resolution of the conflicts that were among the most difficult. We have seen you promoting peace on all continents. Your wise, tenacious diplomatic activity obtained a cease-fire accord which put an end to the conflict between Iran and Iraq. To you Namibia owes the fact that it gained independence. You contributed to the accords in regard to Afghanistan. Your mediation has allowed the progress of freedom in several Central American countries which for a long time had been torn apart by deadly conflicts. You have not ceased to turn your attention to the worrisome situation in Cyprus. Most recently, thanks to your patient, discreet involvement, people who have been held hostage for years in the Near East have regained their freedom. At this very moment, the United Nations is accompanying the Cambodian people on the path of peace and rebirth. I cannot mention all the areas in which you personally participated in the United Nations' positive activity, not even in the change of relations between East and West. For all this, I want to express the gratitude of the peoples in whose service you have placed all your capacities and devotion.

My most fervent wish, Your Excellency, is that following 10 years of international responsibility, you will have the satisfaction of seeing your work pursued, of seeing the impulse which you have given continue to bring about progress in the many areas which concern the United Nations.

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*\*L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English n. 49 p.2.*

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