



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS ACCREDITED TO THE HOLY SEE***

Saturday, 15 January 1994

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. "For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and hope". Thus the Prophet Jeremiah reports words received from God himself (cf. 29:11).

A future and hope. Such are my good wishes for you, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, for your families and your homelands. You represent the greater part of the peoples of the earth. Thus, through you, it is all your compatriots whom I greet and to whom I offer my prayerful good wishes that each one of them may be granted happiness and prosperity, in freedom and justice. These wishes I likewise address, with the same goodwill, to all the nations which are not yet represented at the Holy See, but which certainly have a place in the heart and prayer of the Pope.

Your Dean, dear Mr Joseph Amichia, has been good enough to recall with his customary delicacy, my various activities during the year which has just ended. I thank him warmly for his words of esteem and for the cordial good wishes which he has expressed in your name. I see in them an encouragement for the whole Catholic Church to pursue her task as a witness to faith in the "goodness of God" (Ti 3:4), that goodness which the feast of Christmas has manifested to us once more, in its astonishing freshness.

2. For Christmas is simply the revelation of the divine love, offered to all men and women. It is the light which illuminated the night of Bethlehem; it is the Good News proclaimed to all the peoples on the day of the Epiphany. These recent celebrations have naturally turned our thoughts towards the Holy Land, where Jesus was born and to which we have been on a spiritual pilgrimage.

For the first time in very many years, peace seems possible, thanks to the good will of the people who live there today. Yesterday's enemies are talking to one another and talking together about the future. The dynamism of the Madrid Conference, begun in 1991, continues to inspire all those bravely striving to ensure that dialogue and negotiations will triumph over every sort of extremism and selfishness. Israelis and Palestinians, the children of Isaac and of Ishmael, have begun a journey: all their friends have a duty to help them continue it to the end. It is a question of an imperious duty, for to perpetuate a situation of uncertainty and especially of heavy sufferings for the Palestinian population - trials which are well known to us - makes even more serious the present difficulties and risks putting once more out of reach the longed for practical results of the dialogue which has been begun.

It is this background of hope and frailty which is the setting for the conversations which have enabled the State of Israel and the Holy See to sign an accord on a number of fundamental principles suitable for regulating their mutual relations and of guaranteeing for the Catholic Church in that country conditions for a normal existence. There is no doubt that all believers will also draw benefits from the accord. Furthermore, the Holy See is convinced that this new form of relationship with the State of Israel will enable it while safeguarding its specific spiritual and moral nature, to help consolidate the desire for justice and peace entertained by all those who are involved in the peace process. Without renouncing any of the principles which have inspired its activity in the past, the Holy See will therefore continue to work to ensure that, in respect for the law and the legitimate aspirations of individuals and peoples, it will be possible to find without delay solutions to other questions which so far have received only partial answers. It is impossible to over-emphasize that among these questions there figures the status of the Holy City of Jerusalem, which greatly interests believers in the religions of the Book.

In fact, it is the whole region which should benefit from this happy development. I am thinking in particular of Lebanon, the sovereignty and unity of which are not yet adequately ensured. Nor do I forget, not far from there, Iraq, whose inhabitants are still paying very dearly the price of war.

3. Looking farther East, I would like to call Afghanistan to your attention. Perhaps some have forgotten the sufferings of these peoples, hostages of divisions and violence which know no truce. I take the opportunity offered to me today to invite the international community not to lose interest in that country, and to work towards a regional solution which could give it some guarantees for the future.

In the continent of Asia live hard working peoples striving to develop their economy, at the cost of great sacrifices on the material and human levels. I am thinking about the great people of China, of course, but also of the nation of Vietnam, whose efforts at opening up and rejoining the international community should be welcomed.

I salute the progress peacefully made by Cambodia, with the support of the United Nations, and

which allows a more serene outlook on the future.

Unfortunately, areas of shadow still linger in that part of the world. The ethnic groups of Sri Lanka confront each other ruthlessly. The people of East Timor aspire to see their cultural and religious identity increasingly safeguarded. The inhabitants of the Island of Bougainville, tragically isolated from the rest of the world, are the victims of bloody rivalries. We cannot forget their trials.

In this vast region of the Far East live devout Catholic communities of remarkable apostolic vigour. Several of them, and I say this with profound sorrow, are today still deprived of their most fundamental freedoms and are victims of intolerable discrimination. Some have been reduced to a precarious existence, unable, for example, to have recourse to the aid of missionaries whose entry is made almost impossible by administrative measures. Other communities are prevented from gathering for worship or making religious writings freely available. Yet others are denied the right to organize themselves in conformity with the law of the Church or to maintain normal contacts with the Apostolic See. The same is true for those experiencing the difficult condition of living in secrecy. In calling your attention to these sad situations, I would hope that the leaders of the nations will generously cooperate in finding necessary solutions, for this is also a question of justice.

4. Last year, Latin America still remained a region of contrasts. It is certainly true that, with few exceptions, the governments in power are the result of democratic elections. Inflation and the weight of debt have diminished slightly, even though the social costs have been high and the absolute index of poverty has grown.

The beginning of this year is unfortunately marked by serious tensions and violence which have spread in certain regions of Mexico. Let us hope that there too dialogue will prevail so that a common effort will make it possible to discover the causes of these sad events and so that it will be possible to respond to the legitimate desires of the peoples involved in a spirit of mutual esteem.

There is no doubt that the American countries of the Southern Hemisphere have human and material possibilities still insufficiently developed. Cooperative structures are to be encouraged, like those which already exist (I am thinking for example, of the Contadora Group or the Common Market of the Southern Cone). Regular summit meetings between Heads of State, and the recent signing of the free trade agreement between the United States, Mexico and Canada have been added to those traditional institutions. Let us hope that real benefits for all these deprived peoples will result.

It is also urgently necessary to speed up the normalization of political situations which are still precarious. In Guatemala and El Salvador, the disarming of the armed factions, the reintegration of former combatants, and political and social reforms are only going ahead slowly, and sometimes suffering setbacks. A true culture of peace has not yet been established in this region,

despite the sustained efforts of many leaders, in particular of the Catholic Church and her pastors. Nicaragua too is experiencing a worrying situation, for the different sectors of society do not always manage to agree upon a model for society resting on values shared by all.

Great countries continue to be the prey of endemic evils such as the ever wider gap between rich and poor, administrative corruption, terrorism and drug trafficking. All these nations, large and small need a fresh impulse of moral vigour which should not be impossible, since their peoples profess the Christian faith.

To say that the Catholic Church knows that she is invested with a particular responsibility is a point I have had the opportunity to emphasize during my apostolic visits to that part of the world. Moreover, the Episcopates continue vigorously to express the basic principles of Catholic social teaching. It is necessary that the common good should be the one goal of both governors and governed "the good of all and of each individual because we are all really responsible for all" (*Sollicitudo rei socialis*, n. 38).

We cannot leave this region of the globe without mentioning two countries suffering in a particular way: Cuba and Haiti.

The people of Cuba are experiencing especially serious material difficulties, caused by both internal and external factors. It is important that this country should not be left isolated; Cubans should be helped to regain confidence in themselves. In their courageous message, "Love Hopes All Things", the Bishops have indicated a priority: "To revitalize the hope of Cubans". We must all help them to rediscover their unity on the path towards a society ever more marked by solidarity and respectful of the innate values of each individual. At any rate, the Catholic Church in Cuba has convincingly shown its desire to make a spiritual and moral contribution to the country by fostering education in forgiveness, reconciliation and dialogue, which are the foundations on which is built a society in which everyone feels at home.

Not far from there, Haiti continues to go through endless ordeals. In their recent Christmas message, the Bishops of Haiti dearly described the "physical and moral sufferings which beset the people, eat away at society and bring destruction to the country". In Haiti too, the complete reconciliation of minds and the renunciation of divisions which have grown worse over the last two years ought to become a reality. And this will only happen through a dialogue of all sectors of society. An honest, respectful dialogue without prejudice, with one single goal to seek unselfishly the true good of the nation. I can only invite the international community to contribute as far as possible to a speedy realization of this aim. Ready-made political models cannot be imposed on the Haitian people, at the risk of giving rise to fresh divisions. It is the Haitians themselves who must build their future, in accordance with the principles restated in so timely a manner by the Bishops in the message mentioned above: the end does not justify the means; force cannot be set above right political life cannot be dissociated from morality.

5. Let us take the time to consider the situation in Africa, a continent which is changing and going through a decisive period of its history. In recent months numbers of its peoples have once more expressed their legitimate claims to democracy and pluralism. This is a positive development, and it must be taken into account. There can be no going back! It is a hopeful sign that several nations have undertaken, by peaceful means, a major effort for institutional renewal.

The peace process in Mozambique is taking hold, albeit slowly, but with the prospect of elections in the autumn of 1994. South Africa has courageously overcome the final obstacles inspired by racial reactions to building a multi racial society in which every person should feel responsible for the well being of others. Nearby in the Indian Ocean, Madagascar has been able to bring about a peaceful transition towards a democratic society. Let us hope that these examples catch on, for too many African nations are still prevented from setting out on to the path of political and social renewal.

The case of Angola is a tragic one. Elections have been followed by a return to hostilities between factions, and this in defiance of the people's choice. Recent news nevertheless speaks of a return to dialogue. May the Angolans understand that no one will emerge victorious from such fratricidal conflicts! In any case, the people can only suffer from them, reduced as they are to living conditions unworthy of man.

Burundi has recently seen a fresh outbreak of ethnic rivalries, which have plunged it once more into the horrors of barbarism and poverty, gravely weakening its most basic institutional structures. After the killings of last autumn, the moment for forgiveness and reconciliation has come. God expects this from the Burundi people. The election of a new President of the Republic, just two days ago, is a hopeful sign.

Not far from there, a vast country of considerable human and material resources is in the process of dissolution: Zaire. It is going through a political crisis which could easily degenerate into an uncontrollable civil war. Here I would like to issue a fatherly but firm appeal to all those who have some responsibility in prolonging and aggravating the situation: things must change quickly. No cause, no ambition, can justify the state of institutional and material decay in which almost thirty million citizens are forced to live. The interests of individuals and groups must give way before the common good and before the legitimate aspirations of the national community as a whole. Otherwise chaos will prevail, international isolation will become more rigid, and finally the country's future will be mortgaged for many years to come.

In nearby Congo, and in Togo, we are forced to note with regret that there too the wishes expressed by the people have not yet succeeded in prevailing. Certainly it is not political ploys or recourse to force which can make a credible order spring up and lead the peoples to work together in planning a society.

Let us hope too that the process of democratization being undertaken in Gabon will not be definitively brushed aside and that those in power will have the farsightedness to allow all the Gabonese themselves to be the artisans of a better future.

Similarly, let us hope that Nigeria will find a way to avoid drifting into authoritarianism, so that the people can freely find their way again on the basis of common values. This would finally make possible the development of the economic potential of this great country, within an ordered and stable context.

Let us hope that Liberia, which is trying to emerge from the war that has despoiled it since 1989, can be helped by its traditional partners in its first steps along the road to peace and reconstruction!

If we turn our attention to the East of the continent, we rejoice to see Eritrea increasing in stability and experiencing a certain growth, even if it is still modest.

Sadly, two sources of war remain, sowing death and desolation: I am obviously thinking of the conflicts still devastating Somalia and the Sudan. To the dead are added the wounded and the tragedy of the displaced persons, condemned to material and moral insecurity. How can one not fail to invite the parties in these conflicts, which too often assume a tribal character, to enter into a serious dialogue? I hope that the competent International Organizations will take steps to appeal to the local individuals and groups most committed to peace, and that at the same time they will support the institutions which are capable of bringing about in these countries the acceptance of a courageous and necessary process of a return to brotherhood. For peace and security can only come from the Somalis and Sudanese themselves.

I must mention again the grave crisis rocking Algeria. The combination of armed violence and the escalation in terrorism seem to have brought that country to a political stalemate. The various sections of the Algerian people must come together. The friends of that great country should help it to establish a frank dialogue between all parties, so as to break out of the vicious circle of hatred, revenge and killings. May the Mediterranean, the home of civilization par excellence, be spared a fresh wound!

In many countries of Africa we find ourselves face to face with new ways in which people are working for their future. It is often admitted that it is a question of an irreversible trend. But it is important that the political alternative should not be translated into ethnic changeover: that would be proof that nothing is changing. I am convinced that the uniqueness of the ethnic, cultural and social structures of Africa will enable each nation to develop its own state of law and democracy. What is urgently necessary is to put an end to the state of lawlessness which is spreading in too many African countries. It would be fitting to take note of this factor in the establishment of programmes of cooperation with these states. For cooperation is still necessary: Africans have to

be able to rely on the many different forms of help provided by their friends - especially of their European partners - so that their material and technical development can keep up with their democratic development. It is clear in particular, that they need support in the face of the plague constituted by the AIDS epidemic, and, apart from that, for the acceptance and feeding of displaced persons and of the great number of refugees in this continent.

It is in this tormented context of the continent that the Catholic Church is shortly going to celebrate a special assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops. With the help of God, this will be a great moment of prayer and reflection which will help the Catholics of those regions, pastors and faithful, to place themselves once more in the presence of God, in order to refocus their lives, personally and collectively, and to look around themselves and learn to see in every African the human being which he is and not just his ethnic identity. It is necessary to build bridges, not walls, between people, as well as between nations and the different groups which comprise them.

6. And here we are on the shores as it were of the "old continent", pulled between integration and fragmentation. On the one hand, in fact, Europe possesses a network of multi state institutions which ought to help it to bring to fulfilment its noble community project. But on the other hand, this same Europe is as it were weakened by growing tendencies to individualism which are giving rise to reactions inspired by the most primitive forms of racism and nationalism. The conflicts which are steeping the Caucasus and Bosnia-Herzegovina in blood are proof of this.

These European contradictions seem to have left political leaders at a loss, unable to control these paradoxical tendencies in a global manner and through negotiation.

It is certain that the barbarous and unjustifiable war which for nearly two years has been staining Bosnia-Herzegovina in blood, after devastating Croatia, has considerably eroded the goodwill which Europe used to enjoy. The fighting goes on. The most iniquitous forms of extremism are still being seen. The peoples are still in the hands of torturers without morals. Innocent civilians are systematically being made the target of hidden snipers. Mosques and churches are being destroyed. The villages, emptied of their inhabitants, cannot be counted any more.

This morning, before you, Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like once more to condemn in the most categorical manner, the crimes against man and humanity which are being perpetrated before our very eyes. I would like once more to appeal to the conscience of everyone:- to all those carrying a weapon, I ask them to put it down; what is taken or destroyed by force will never do honour to a man or to the cause he claims to uphold; - to the humanitarian organizations, I express my admiration for the work they are accomplishing at great cost, and I ask them to continue without becoming discouraged; - I ask European political leaders to redouble their efforts to persuade the warring factions so that reason will finally prevail; - to the peoples of Europe, I ask them not to forget, through weariness or selfishness, their brothers and sisters trapped in conflicts which have been imposed on them by their leaders.

To everyone, I would like to make them share the firm conviction which I have: war is not inevitable; peace is possible! It is possible because man has a conscience and a heart. It is possible because God loves each one of us, just as each one is, so as to transform and make him or her grow.

Thus it is that, after so many years, peace in Northern Ireland could become a reality. Let no one reject it! It depends on the goodwill of every person and of every group that today's hope may be something more than an illusion.

It would in fact be a scandal to see Europe resign itself and accept that the law is ultimately scorned, that international order is ridiculed by the actions of armed bands, that society's objectives are conceived as a means to the supremacy of a particular nationality. The fact that the United Nations Organization has set up a tribunal to judge war crimes and crimes against humanity in the former Yugoslav Federation is a sign that the ignominy perpetrated there is being recognized more and more. Some are even calling for the establishment of a permanent International Tribunal to judge crimes against humanity. Does this not show that, far from progressing, international society is running a serious risk of regressing?

7. If we reflect on what is at the bottom of the collective behaviour which we have just described in Africa and Europe, we shall easily discover the presence of exaggerated forms of nationalism. And it is not a question of legitimate love of country or of esteem for its identity, but a rejection of others because they are different, in order more easily to dominate them. Every means is good: the exaltation of race which goes so far as to identify nation and ethnic group, the glorification of the State which thinks and decides for everyone, the imposition of a uniform economic model, the levelling out of cultural differences. We are faced with a new paganism: the deification of the nation. History has shown that the passage from nationalism to totalitarianism is swift and that, when States are no longer equal, people themselves end up by no longer being equal. Thus the natural solidarity between peoples is destroyed, the sense of proportion is distorted, the principle of the unity of mankind is held in contempt.

The Catholic Church cannot accept such a vision of things. Universal by nature, she is conscious of being at the service of all and never identifies with any one national community. She welcomes into her bosom all nations, races and cultures. She is mindful of - indeed she knows that she is the depository of - God's design for humanity: to gather all people into one family. And this because he is the Creator and Father of all. That is the reason why every time that Christianity - whether according to its Western or Eastern tradition - becomes the instrument of a form of nationalism, it is as if it were wounded in its very heart and made sterile.

My predecessor Pope Pius XI had already condemned these serious deviations in 1937 in his Encyclical Letter *Mit brennender Sorge*, when he wrote: "Whoever exalts race, or the people, or the State, or a particular form of State, or the depositories of power, or any other fundamental

value of the human community... and divinizes them to an idolatrous level, distorts and perverts an order of the world planned and created by God" (A,4S 29 [1937], n. 8, p. 149).

Europe is now made up for the most part of States of small or medium size. But they all have their patrimony of values, the same dignity and the same rights. No power can put limits on their fundamental rights, unless they endanger the rights of other nations. If the international community cannot come to an agreement on the means to deal at the source with this problem of nationalist claims, it is foreseeable that whole continents will be as it were poisoned and that there will be a progressive return to relationships based on force, in which the first to suffer will be people themselves. In fact, the rights of peoples go hand in hand with human rights.

8. In this regard, I would like to recall before you who are experienced diplomats the great responsibility incumbent on those who administer public life. They are in the first place the servants of their brothers and sisters and, in an uncertain world such as ours, people look to them as points of reference. In my latest Encyclical I recalled that "openness in public administration, impartiality in the service of the body politic, respect for the rights of political adversaries, safeguarding the rights of the accused against summary trials and conviction, the just and honest use of public funds, the rejection of equivocal or illicit means in order to gain, preserve or increase power at any cost, all these are principles which are primarily rooted in... the transcendent value of the person and the objective moral demands of the functioning of States" (*Veritatis splendor*, n. 101).

In too many societies, including in Europe, those in positions of responsibility seem to have abdicated in the face of the demands of a political ethic which takes into account man's transcendence and the relative nature of systems of social organization. It is time that they joined together and conformed to certain moral demands which concern the public powers just as much as the citizens. In this regard, I wrote in the same Encyclical: "In the face of serious forms of social and economic injustice and political corruption affecting entire peoples and nations, there is a growing reaction of indignation on the part of very many people whose fundamental human rights have been trampled upon and held in contempt, as well as an ever more widespread and acute sense of the need for a radical personal and social renewal capable of ensuring justice, solidarity, honesty and openness" (*ibid.*, n. 98).

In this difficult but so necessary work of moral resurgence, Catholics, together with other believers, are called to accept their responsibility to bear witness. The presence of Catholics in the running of societies is part of the social doctrine of the Church, and civil authorities and citizens alike should be able to count on them. It is a question here of a form of proclaiming the Gospel and the values which it contains that is helpful, indeed necessary, for the building of a more human society. I am convinced that, just as they were once capable of doing in so many countries of the Europe of old Christians will again be capable of a political and social involvement enabling them to state and, even more, to demonstrate by their generosity and unselfishness that we are not the creators of

the world. On the contrary, we receive the world from God who creates it and creates us.

Therefore we are just stewards who, in respect for God's plan, are meant to increase goods in order to share them. Here I would like to quote the forceful words of Saint Paul: "You are called, as you know, to liberty... Serve one another, rather, in works of love... If you go snapping at each other and tearing each other to pieces, you had better watch or you will destroy one another" (*Gal* 5:13,

9. Having for too many years experienced a division imposed by reductive ideologies, the world should not now be experiencing a season of exclusions! On the contrary, now should be the season of coming together and of solidarity between East and West, between North and South. Glancing at the world today, as we have just done, we can only state with deep regret that too many human beings are still the victims of their brothers. But we cannot resign ourselves to this.

Having begun the year which the United Nations Organization has dedicated to the Family, let us act in such a way that humanity will more and more resemble a genuine family in which each individual knows he is listened to, appreciated and loved, in which each is ready to sacrifice self for the benefit of the other, and no one hesitates to help the weaker one. Let us listen to the challenge of the Apostle John: "If any one has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?" (*1 Jn* 3: 17).

In this Christmas season, the unheard of tenderness of God is offered to all mankind; how clearly this is shown by the Child in the crib! Each one of us is invited to the boldness of brotherhood. This is my heartfelt wish for each of you, for each of your fellow-citizens, for all the nations of the earth.

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