



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE JOHN PAUL II  
IN RESPONSE TO THE NEW YEAR GREETINGS  
OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS  
ACCREDITED TO THE HOLY SEE\***

*13 January 1997*

*Your Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

1. Your Dean, Ambassador Joseph Amichia, has just presented to me your cordial greetings with his usual serenity and graciousness. He has done this for the last time, since after more than twenty-five years he will soon return definitively to his beloved Côte-d'Ivoire. In your name I would like to offer to him, to his wife and family and to all his fellow-citizens, our best wishes for a future which will enable them to realize their most cherished aspirations.

To all of you, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, I offer cordial thanks for your greetings and good wishes; and I am grateful for the signs of appreciation which you so often show for the international activity of the Holy See. I will shortly have the opportunity to greet you personally and to express to you my sentiments of esteem. Through you, I would also like to send my affectionate and prayerful good wishes to the leaders of your countries and to your fellow-citizens. May the year 1997 mark a decisive stage in the establishment of peace and a prosperity more fully shared by all the peoples of the earth!

In my [Message for the 1997 World Day of Peace](#), I invited all people of good will to "set out together on a true pilgrimage of peace, starting from the concrete situation in which we find ourselves" (No. 1). How better to begin if not with you, Ladies and Gentlemen, who are expert and attentive observers of international life? At the beginning of this year, what is the state of hope and peace? This is the question which, together with you, I would like to answer.

2. *Hope*. Very fortunately, hope is not absent from the horizon of humanity. *Disarmament* has taken important steps forward with the signing of the Treaty completely banning nuclear testing, a Treaty which the Holy See also signed, in the hope that it will be accepted by everyone. From now on the nuclear arms race and the proliferation of nuclear weapons have been banned from society.

This must not however make us less vigilant with regard to the production of increasingly sophisticated *conventional and chemical weapons*, or indifferent to the problems caused by anti-personnel mines. Regarding the latter, I express the hope that a juridically binding agreement with appropriate provisions for inspection will see the light of day at the meeting scheduled in Brussels next June. Everything must be done in order to build a safer world!

Almost all Governments, meeting in Istanbul under the auspices of the United Nations Organization for the Second Conference on Human Settlements and in Rome for the World Summit of the U.N. Food and Agricultural Organization, have made concrete commitments with a view to better reconciling *development, economic growth and solidarity*. The right to housing and the equitable sharing of the earth's resources emerged as priorities for the future: these represent decisive steps forward.

We must likewise take note of the agreement reached at the end of the year in Abidjan for peace in *Sierra Leone*, while at the same time expressing the hope that disarmament and the demobilization of the armed forces will take place without delay. May the same come true in neighbouring *Liberia*, itself engaged in a difficult process of normalization and of preparation for free elections.

In *Guatemala*, peace seems finally to be at hand after too many years of fratricidal conflict. The agreement signed on 29 December last, by creating a climate of trust, should favour the settlement, in unity and with courage, of the many social problems still to be resolved.

Turning our gaze towards Asia, we await the date of 1 July 1997, when *Hong Kong* will return under the sovereignty of Mainland China. By reason of the size and vitality of the Catholic community living in the territory, the Holy See will follow with very particular interest this new stage, trusting that respect for differences, for the fundamental rights of the human person and for the rule of law will accompany this new journey forward, prepared for by patient negotiations.

3. In the second place, *peace*. It still seems precarious in more than one place on the earth, and, in any event, it is always at the mercy of the self-interest and the lack of proper foresight on the part of many leaders of international life.

Quite near to us, *Algeria* continues to wallow in an abyss of unprecedented violence, giving a bleak impression of an entire people taken hostage. The Catholic Church in Algeria paid a heavy

price last year, with the barbaric murder of the seven Trappist Monks of Notre-Dame de l'Atlas, and the brutal death of Bishop Pierre Claverie of Oran. *Cyprus*, still split in two, awaits a political solution, which ought to be worked out in a European context which would offer it a broader variety of possibilities. And then, on the Eastern shore of the Mediterranean, the *Middle East* continues to search uncertainly for the road to peace. Everything must be tried to ensure that the sacrifices and efforts of these past years, since the Madrid Conference, will not have been in vain. For Christians in particular, this "Holy Land" remains the place where there first was heard the message of love and reconciliation: "Peace on earth to men of good will!"

All people together, Jews, Christians and Muslims, Israelis and Arabs, believers and non-believers, must create and reinforce peace: the peace of treaties, the peace of trust, the peace in people's hearts! In this part of the world, as elsewhere, peace cannot be just nor can it long endure unless it rests on sincere dialogue between equal partners, with respect for each other's identity and history, unless it rests on the right of peoples to the free determination of their own destiny, upon their independence and security. There can be no exception! And all those who have accompanied the parties most directly involved in the difficult Middle East peace process must redouble their efforts to ensure that the modest capital of trust already accumulated is not wasted, but rather increases and bears interest.

In recent few months, a hotbed of tension has dramatically enveloped the entire *region of the Great Lakes in Africa*. Burundi, Rwanda and Zaire in particular have found themselves trapped in the deadly cogs of unbridled violence and ethnic rivalry, which have plunged entire nations into human tragedies which should leave no one indifferent. No solution will ever be worked out until the political and military leaders are seated around the negotiating table, with the help of the international community, in order to study together how their necessary and unavoidable relationships should take shape. The international community, and I include here the regional organizations of Africa, must not only find a remedy for the indifference recently shown with regard to the humanitarian tragedies which the entire world has witnessed, but also increase its political activity lest new tragic developments, the carving up of territories or the displacement of populations, create situations which no one will be able to control. The security of a country or region cannot be founded on the accumulation of risks.

In *Sri Lanka*, hopes for peace have been shattered in the face of fighting which has again devastated entire regions of the Island. The persistence of these clashes is an obvious obstacle to economic progress. There too negotiations must be taken up anew in order to arrive at a cease-fire which will allow the future to be planned in a more serene manner.

Looking finally at *Europe* we can see that the forging of European Institutions and the deepening of a European concept of security and defence should ensure for the citizens of this continent's countries a more stable future, because it will rest on a patrimony of shared values: respect for human rights, the primacy of liberty and democracy, the rule of law, the right to economic and

social progress. All of this, of course, with a view to the integral development of the human person. But Europeans too must remain vigilant, for it is always possible to drift off course, as the Balkan crisis has made clear: persisting ethnic tensions, exaggerated nationalism, intolerance of every sort constitute permanent threats. The hotbeds of tension remaining in the Caucasus tell us that the contagion of these negative influences can only be checked by the establishment of a true culture of peace and of a true education in peace. For the moment, in too many areas of Europe one has the impression that people are coexisting rather than cooperating. We must never forget what one of post-war Europe's "Founding Fathers" wrote as the inscription to his memoirs, I am quoting here Jean Monnet: "We do not make coalitions of States, we unite people!"

4. This rapid panorama of the international situation suffices to show that between the progress already made and the problems still unresolved, political leaders have a broad field of action. And what the international community perhaps lacks most of all today is not written Conventions or forums for self-expression — there is a profusion of these! — but *a moral law* and the courage to abide by it.

The community of nations, like every human society, cannot escape this basic principle: it must be regulated by a rule of law, valid for all of them without exception. Every juridical system, as we know, has as its foundation and end the common good. And this applies to the international community as well: the good of all and the good of the whole! This is what makes possible equitable solutions in which gain is not made at the expense of others, even when those who benefit are the majority: justice is for all, without injustice being inflicted on anyone. The function of law is to give each person his due, to give him what is owed to him in justice. Law therefore has a strong moral implication. And *international law itself is founded on values*. The dignity of the person, or guaranteeing the rights of nations, for example, are moral principles before they are juridical norms. And this explains why it was philosophers and theologians who, between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, were the first theorists of international society and the precursors of an explicit recognition of *ius gentium*. Moreover, we cannot fail to note that international law is no longer a mere law between States, but rather tends more and more to bring individuals together by international definitions of human rights, of the international right to health care or the right to humanitarian aid, to mention but a few examples.

There is thus an urgent need to organize the post-Cold War peace and the post-1989 freedom on the foundation of moral values which are diametrically opposed to that law which would see the stronger, the richer or the bigger imposing on others their cultural models, economic *diktats* or ideological models. In this sense, attempts to form an international criminal justice system are evidence of real progress in the moral conscience of the nations. The development of humanitarian initiatives, whether intergovernmental or private, is also a positive sign of a re-awakening of solidarity in response to intolerable situations of violence or injustice. But, in this same regard, we must be careful to ensure that these acts of generosity do not rapidly become a kind of justice of the victors, or conceal ulterior motives of domination which would base decisions

on concerns of spheres of influence, the preservation of control or the reconquest of trade markets.

For a long time international law has been a law of war and peace. I believe that it is called more and more to become exclusively a law of peace, conceived in justice and solidarity. And in this context morality must inspire law; morality can even assume a preparatory role in the making of law, to the extent that it shows the path of what is right and good.

5. Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, these are the reflections which I wished to share with you at the beginning of the New Year. Perhaps they can inspire your own reflection and activity in the service of justice, solidarity and peace between the nations which you represent.

In my prayers, I entrust to God the well-being and prosperity of your fellow citizens, the plans of your Governments for the spiritual and temporal good of their peoples, and the efforts of the international community to ensure that right and law prevail.

On our pilgrimage of peace, the Christmas star guides us and shows us mankind's true path as it invites us to follow the path of God.

May God bless you and your countries; may he grant you all a happy year!

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*\*L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English n. 3 pp.6, 7.*

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