



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS
TO MEMBERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL
CATHOLIC CHILD BUREAU (BICE)**

Friday, 11 April 2014

I thank you for this meeting. I appreciate your commitment on behalf of children: it is an effective and current expression of the Lord Jesus' predilection for them. I have to say that in a well-structured society privileges must only be for children and the elderly. For the future of a people is in their hands! Children, because they will certainly have the strength to carry history forward, and the elderly because they carry within them the wisdom of a people and they must pass on this wisdom.

We can say that the BICE came into being through the motherhood of the Church. In fact, it originates from [Pope Pius XII](#)'s intervention in defense of children in the aftermath of World War II. Since then, this organization has always been committed to promoting the protection of children's rights, and to contributing to the 1989 UN Convention. And in its work it constantly cooperates with the Holy See offices in New York, in Strasbourg and especially Geneva.

You spoke discreetly of the sensitive treatment in defence of the abused. I thank you for this discreet expression. But I feel compelled to personally assume all the evil which some priests — really quite a number, but not in proportion to the total number — to assume the burden myself and to ask for forgiveness for the harm they have done for having sexually abused children. The Church is aware of this damage. It is a personal, moral damage carried out by men of the Church, and we will not take one step backward concerning the treatment of this problem and the sanctions that must be imposed. On the contrary, I believe that we have to be very strong. There is no messing around when it comes to children!

In our day, it is important to implement the projects against slave-labour, against the recruitment of child soldiers and all forms of violence against minors.

On a positive note, we must reaffirm the right of children to grow up in a family with a father and a mother capable of creating a suitable environment for the child's development and emotional maturity. Continuing to grow up and mature in a correct relationship represented by the masculinity and femininity of a father and a mother and thus preparing for affective maturity.

At the same time, this implies supporting the right of parents to decide the moral and religious education of their children. And in this regard I would like to express my rejection of any kind of educational experimentation on children. We cannot experiment on children and young people. They are not lab specimens! The horrors of the manipulation of education that we experienced in the great genocidal dictatorships of the 20th century have not disappeared; they have retained a current relevance under various guises and proposals and, with the pretense of modernity, push children and young people to walk on the dictatorial path of "only one form of thought". A little over a week ago a great teacher said to me... "At times with these projects — referring to actual educational projects — one doesn't know whether the child is going to school or to a re-education camp".

Working for human rights presupposes the vital aim of fostering anthropological formation, of proper knowledge of the reality of the human person, and knowing how to respond to the problems and challenges posed by contemporary culture and the mentality propagated by the mass media. Obviously this does not mean we should take refuge in hidden protected areas, that today are unable to foster life, that belong to a past culture... No, not this, this is not good.... We should face the challenges the new culture launches with the positive values of the human person. For you, this means offering your managers and operators continuing formation on the anthropology of the child, because that is where rights and duties have their foundation. It is against this background that educational projects must be planned and developed, mature and adapt to the signs of the times, always respecting the human identity and freedom of conscience.

Thank you again. I wish your work success!

The logo that the Commission of the protection of children and adolescents in Buenos Aires I had comes to mind, and which Norberto knows very well. The logo of the Holy Family on a donkey fleeing to Egypt to protect their child. Sometimes it is necessary to escape in order to defend; sometimes it is necessary to stop in order to protect; sometimes it is necessary to fight. But we must always have tenderness.

Thank you for the work you do!
