



The Holy See

*Message of John Paul II to the Director-General of the United Nations Children's Fund
on the occasion of the 40th Anniversary of its establishment**

10 November 1986

I am very pleased to extend my greetings and best wishes to you and to all those associated with the United Nations Children's Fund on the occasion of the Fortieth Anniversary of its establishment.

It is particularly appropriate that this Fund, which has done so much for the children of the world over the past four decades, should celebrate its own beginnings at the time of year when much of the world is preparing for Christmas. This season, more than others, focuses on children. It calls to mind the birth of Jesus Christ as a human child; it reminds us too of the children of today, who celebrate this festival with a special sense of wonder and joy.

All people of good will, whether believers or non-believers, love their children and want what is best for them. We all recognize that children are precious treasures entrusted to the wisdom and humanity of each generation. What is so clearly evident bears repeating: that the future of peoples and nations - and today we must add the very future of our planet - rests with the children. To the extent that they experience love and security in their families and society, they will be disposed to be loving and unafraid as adults. If they grow up without these fundamental human supports, there is always the danger that hostility and insecurity will follow. Humanity must recognize that all have a common interest and a common responsibility to protect and promote the well-being of children everywhere.

Religious faith confirms the special claim that children have on our love and care. Christians in particular are familiar with their Master's words: "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." (Lk. 18:16-17). The way that Jesus identified himself with children, exemplified in his statement that "whoever receives one such a

child in my name receives me", impels us to a loving concern for children, the living signs of that mystery of life and hope which he revealed.

Since its inception forty years ago, the United Nations Children's Fund has acted vigorously to promote the life and well-being of the world's children. Originally established as an emergency fund for Europe after the Second World War, UNICEF was later expanded to include the needs of children throughout the world. Today, in addition to war, poverty and famine, children are being subjected to new forms of suffering as a result of moral and cultural crises. These include the plight of refugee and migrant children and those in other high-risk situations; child victims of prostitution and pornography; those dying of preventable diseases; and on the eve of the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless, we must also remember children who, with their families, have no decent and stable place to live.

The Catholic Church has collaborated with UNICEF throughout the world in Child Programmes for survival and development; in expanded literacy programmes; immunization projects; and in other undertakings which foster both physical health from the moment of conception and likewise the moral and spiritual development of children. The Church stands ready to continue this promotion of much needed services for all the children of the world. She also remains convinced that one of the most effective responses to the troubled situation of so many children today is the reinforcement of family life through national and international policies enabling families to fulfil the irreplaceable role which properly belongs to them.

It is my fervent hope and prayer that, in a world in which the survival and growth of millions of children is tragically imperilled by adverse moral, social and economic factors, the United Nations Children's Fund will continue to be an effective instrument for the protection and the development of the unborn, of infants, and of all the children with whom God continues to enrich the human family. On the occasion of this Fortieth Anniversary celebration, I invoke upon you and all those associated with UNICEF abundant divine blessings.

JOHN PAUL II

**Paths to Peace* p.364-365.

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