



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II

TO THE PARTICIPANTS AT THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS FOR THE ASSISTANCE OF REFUGEES IN AFRICA

I address you a respectful and trusting greeting. It is to your credit as men, as government leaders and as senior officials of organizations, that you began preparations long ago for this important meeting and that you have come to it with the firm purpose of improving still further standards of reception and living conditions and, thus, to reaffirm the hope of a more human future for the millions of our brothers and sisters who are refugees or have been displaced in the African continent.

As I said recently in Thailand when I addressed the refugees in the Phanat Nikhom camp and in my statement to the members of the Government and the diplomatic corps, it is the human person's dignity - a gift of God - which is at stake. May this thought preside over your work and inspire your decisions!

2. The very large number of refugees should not mean that their problems can be regarded as those of masses of humanity who must merely be sheltered, fed and protected against epidemics, pending their departure for other places. These are our brothers and sisters whom countries have decided to take in, desiring to alleviate their suffering and give them hope. But the heavy financial burden that this involves cannot be borne by the host countries alone, this is why the international community is called upon to give its generous aid.

When you will study the projects submitted, may you look beyond the refugee problem as a whole and think of the individual tragedy of each refugee, of the distress of each family; the causes of these situations will, of course, have to be studied objectively, for they must be eliminated as quickly as possible: they wound adults and young people seriously and sometimes fatally in their human dignity by uprooting them from their cultures and families, by imposing on them physical hardship and idleness, and by denying them the exercise of their social rights. Our own human dignity, as beings whom God has created brothers, would be seriously impugned if we were to

ignore these sufferings.

3. Your participation in this meeting, the purpose of which is to consider projects which are not aimed at mere survival but rather at human promotion and social integration, is already a first response offering hope to the millions of refugees who have turned to you: you will thus show them that they are welcome, respected and loved, and that with your help they themselves will prepare their own future, so that one day they will be able to resume their places in their own countries - an imprescriptible right - with the increased skills acquired during the time of their exile.

When men of good will wish to work together for the benefit of those who suffer, when they are in agreement and combine their efforts for greater effectiveness, our humanity is rendered more fraternal; when we listen to words such as those of the Sermon on the Mount and the Beatitudes, we all of us, men and women of every religion, are preparing a world in which life will be better

The Secretary-General of the United Nations, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Organization of African Unity, all participating Governments and all non-governmental organizations represented here are to be congratulated on their initiative and praised for the generosity of their commitments.

July 5, 1984

**Paths to Peace p. 436-437.*
