



# The Holy See

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## **MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE UNITED NATIONS\***

*To His Excellency*

*Mr Salim Ahmed Salim*

*President of the General Assembly*

*of the United Nations Organization*<sup>1</sup>. The importance of this Special Session and of the content of its work prompts me to send to this distinguished Assembly some thoughts and reflections on a subject which has been a constant concern of the Holy See, especially during the past two decades. The Holy See intends moreover by this message to pledge its continued interest in this area. The work of preparation for this Session has been long and involved. It has absorbed the energies and the resources of the major organs of the United Nations Organization, and has been the focus of much work and of great expectations on the part of peoples around the world. The Holy See has followed all this work closely and with an earnest desire to be of service. Whatever may have been the gains or shortcomings of past efforts, this Special Session should be seen as a new opportunity to set a course which will benefit all peoples and nations. It deserves to be a new opportunity because of the work that has been put into it, but even more because of the needs and just aspirations of so many people who rightfully continue to look for a better and more humane future for themselves and their children.<sup>2</sup> To be a new opportunity, this Session of the United Nations Organization must not become submerged in the past. Rather it should be an occasion for everyone to learn from the past and to make new strides forward, being aware of what may have hindered progress in the past, so that sterile checkmates may be avoided in the future. This work cannot afford to be caught by old polarities. It must transcend them. It cannot be the captive of stale ideologies; it must instead bypass them. If the participants in this gathering are of one mind in the desire to look afresh at common problems, then already the atmosphere has been created that will make this one of the most productive Sessions that the United Nations system has seen.<sup>3</sup> In these discussions the Catholic Church has her own role to play. She does not seek to speak out on merely economic or technological questions. She does not attempt to give concrete solutions to the complex realities which are not her proper responsibility. This does not mean that the Church is unaware of the complexities of the problems before this Assembly. Nor is she unknowledgeable about the substance and the content of the issues that must be confronted here by the experts from various parts of the world. But the Church speaks here first of all to give witness to her concerns for everything that touches the human condition. Many of you know already that the Holy See has taken part in various ways in most of the preparatory work for this Special Session, as well as participating

in the work of the various organizations whose own concerns figure largely in this Assembly. While the Holy See rightly leaves the purely technological and economic matters to those whose proper responsibilities they are, it continues to be present at these meetings in order to add its voice within the discussions themselves. It does so in order to offer a vision of the human person and society. It does so in order to propose some helpful criteria to ensure that human values, values of the spirit, values of peoples and cultures, are not inadvertently made subservient to some lesser goal of merely economic or material gain that ultimately would prove unworthy of the very person and the very society all of us seek to foster.<sup>4</sup> As has been recognized, ever greater importance is now attributed to non-economic considerations in forming new structures of international relations. In this regard, religious and ethnic factors, education and public opinion play a great part. Peace itself becomes a driving force of so many parts of the global community that peace which is irreconcilable with military or economic wars. Such a perspective does indeed lie before us at this Special Session. And if I speak to you out of my Christian inheritance and use a vocabulary that is proper to those of us who follow the one whom we call the Prince of Peace, this is done with the conviction that the words I speak can be readily understood by men and women of good will everywhere and be of benefit to them.<sup>5</sup> My first major point is an appeal to all of you here, to all peoples everywhere. It is an appeal to go beyond any static positions that belong to a particular ideology. Let every system and each functioning part of a system look to what in fact it can do, to ask what in fact it can contribute, to see how in fact it can advance the real goals of human living, regardless of whatever positions the stale arguments of ideological bias may wish to impose artificially - positions and biases which may hinder rather than promote real progress and fraternal collaboration. There is no question but that this great Assembly has men and women of different, even opposed, systems and ideologies. We cannot, however, afford to let the limitations of ideological biases obstruct our concern for man - man in the concrete, the whole man, every man<sup>[1]</sup>. Therefore we cannot let these ideological categories imprison us. We cannot let outdated conflicts control us in such a way that we cannot respond to the real needs of peoples everywhere.<sup>6</sup> In the place of ideological stalemates that have perhaps prevailed in the past, I would like to suggest a criterion that is an attitude and guiding principle which measures each and every concrete decision that all of you, member States, of this Assembly will make: it is hope, a solid, realistic, hope for every man, woman and child, and for society itself. This hope is not a wish. It is not a vague sentiment. It is a category born of our experience of history and nourished by our common desires for the future. As such, this hope accepts history as the place of its own operation and declares quite openly and quite realistically that the future is a history to be made, to be made by us with the help of Almighty God. It is a future to be built by united efforts to secure the common good through mutual cooperation and collaboration. This hope is, then, the guiding criterion that tells us that, if there is a history to be made and if we are responsible for the common good now and in the future, we must together work out and put into practice the modifications that are necessary now so that the future we yearn for will correspond to the hope we share for all individuals, peoples and nations on this earth.<sup>7</sup> Viewing this attitude of hope as our common outlook and as a guiding principle in the actions of this Assembly, permit me to point out a few of the items that deserve serious consideration at this Session and beyond. The issues I speak of are not the only ones of great importance. They are, however, some of the more urgent concerns that have already been discussed at various UN meetings; and they demand our attention both by reason of the work already devoted to them, and by reason of the urgency of the current world condition.- There is a paramount need for *a greater and more equitable sharing of resources*. This includes the transfer of science and technology, which was the subject of the UN meeting in Vienna last year. It means a technology that is appropriate to the needs and best interests of the people and nations involved. But it means much more than just material sharing. There is an urgent need for a sharing of the resources of the mind and the spirit, of scientific knowledge and cultural and artistic expression. Such a sharing is not one-way. It is mutual and multilateral, and it implies that the cultural, ethical and

religious values of peoples must always be respected by the parties involved in this sharing. It implies mutual openness to learn from one another and to share with one another. In this sharing, there is no question that technological development and economic growth will involve some change in the social and cultural patterns of a people. To a certain extent this is inevitable and must be faced realistically for the sake of the growth of a people. But if we are honest when we say that man is not just *homo oeconomicus*, then all of us must take care to see that any harmful change wherein positive values are sacrificed is minimized and that ethic-moral, cultural and religious values are placed ahead of the merely economic indicators of growth.

In this sharing, finally, it is good to recognize and to support the many new ways of cooperation among peoples and nations. Not only is there sharing between one group and another; developing nations are also learning to share among themselves, and regional groups are aiding one another to help find the best means to further their mutual interests.- You member States of this Assembly cannot rest content with lofty perspectives or ethical ideals alone. You have the responsibility to negotiate together in good faith and mutual respect. The negotiations you carry out should be as all-inclusive as possible, taking into account the advantages to be had from the most complete and far-reaching agreement possible on all the items before you for negotiation. This kind of enlightened realism will do much to construct the necessary modifications for our common future built on our common hope.- My predecessor Paul VI called on the developed nations to contribute 1% of their Gross National Product (GNP) to the cause of development. The figure that is actually set aside today for this purpose seems very much lower. I recognize that inflation is a worldwide problem affecting the industrialized as well as the developing countries. However, the Holy See wishes to reiterate the appeal of Paul VI that 1% of the GNP is not an unrealistic goal. The contribution of this percentage would greatly aid the Common Fund agreed to through the UNCTAD negotiations as well as a possible World Development Fund.- For initiatives of this kind to be effective, there must be a renewed effort on the part of all nations, developed and developing, to end all waste, whether material or human. On the material level the questions of the environment carried on by UNEP and other agencies deserve renewed study and action. The whole problem of energy might well be seen in this context so that the most effective and appropriate energy resources are made available without unnecessary waste and exploitation of materials. On the human level, many UN conferences have highlighted concern for children, for women, for the handicapped, for so many categories and peoples whose resources are being exploited or not used for their good and the good of society. Once again the commitment to various aspects of human development for the common good can rekindle hope for people, giving them the prospect of a fuller and more fruitful existence.- Finally I would be untrue to my charge if I did not call attention to the poor and to those on the margin of society throughout the world. There are countries rich in cultural and other spiritual and human resources, but which are among the poorest economically and among those who are suffering most from the current situation. We all know the staggering statistics about the real horror of famine that afflicts so many around the globe. Suffering peoples in various regions cry out to us to give them relief now so that they can survive. Can all of us who have so much, at least commit ourselves to giving new hope to these poor of the world by realizing a pledge first to relieve their plight and then to provide for their most basic needs, such as food, water, health and shelter. To relieve the immediate suffering and to provide those elements that will help people become more self-reliant would be a sure indication that we are contributing to the hope that this earth and its peoples need. **8.** In so many of these matters, what will be needed is the political will that goes beyond immediate self-interest. Such a political will has in the past led to great achievements such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Such a will must be constantly guided by criteria that exalt the human and social, the ethical and cultural, the moral and spiritual over the solely economic and technological. Such a will needs to be developed not only among world leaders but among all peoples at every level of life. Many issues can be solved only on the global level, and you at this Assembly have these

tasks before you. But many can and ought to be brought to fruitful agreement on the continental or regional or other intermediate level. The need for global solutions to many problems should not blind us to the possibilities of resolving problems and building a better future on less than all-encompassing levels of life. In fact, applying the notion of subsidiarity, we can see that there are many groups and peoples who can solve their own problems better at a local or intermediate level, and that such action moreover gives them a direct sense of participation in their own destinies. This is a positive advance and one to which we all should be sensitive.<sup>9</sup> In my pastoral visits in Europe, in North and South America and in Africa, I have spoken often and in varying ways of the need for the conversion of hearts. I have stressed the need for each one of us to be converted, to see in the other person a brother or a sister united by the bond of a common humanity under God. My predecessor Paul VI in his Encyclical "*Populorum Progressio*", a document which remains one of the enduring and valid contributions to the work of development, said: "There can be no progress towards the complete development of man without the simultaneous development of all humanity in a spirit of solidarity... 'Man must meet man, nation must meet nation, as brothers and sisters, as children of God. In this mutual understanding and friendship, in this sacred communion, we must also begin to work together to build the common future of the human race'"<sup>[2]</sup>. May I complete this message to you today by recalling these words and this perspective to your reflection. May I ask that as you seek a change in the structures that will better serve the common good in justice and equity, you will not forget the education and inspiration of your peoples that will help bring about the conversion of hearts. Only through the conversion of hearts can brothers and sisters "build the common future of the human race", and construct the great and lasting edifice of peace. And it is to this peace - the new name of which aptly remains "development"<sup>[3]</sup> - that all the efforts of this Special Session must be directed. With God's help may it be so! *From the Vatican, 22 August*

1980. IOANNES PAULUS PP. II-----[1] Cf. *Redemptor Hominis*, 43.[2] *Populorum Progressio*, 43.[3] Cf. *Populorum Progressio*,

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\*AAS 72 (1980), p. 818-824. *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. III, 2 pp. 438-445. *L'Osservatore Romano* 27.8.1980 pp.1, 2. *L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English* n. 37 pp. 4-5. *Paths to Peace* pp. 218-221. © Copyright 1980 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana