



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON «DRUG ABUSE AND ILLICIT TRAFFICKING»

*Thursday, 4 June 1987 To the Distinguished Representatives
at the International Conference*

on Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking The phenomenon of drug abuse is one of the greatest tragedies plaguing society today, a tragedy of ever-widening proportions that strikes both industrialized and developing countries with devastating effects on individuals, families and the whole social fabric. The fact that the abusers are predominantly young people poses a particular threat to the future stability of society as we advance towards the end of the Second Millennium. Unfortunately there are indications that this human tragedy is steadily worsening: a) illegal drugs are being produced in ever-increasing quantities; b) illicit drug trafficking which produces immense profits continues unchecked; c) the vastly widespread character of drug abuse which, although concentrated mostly among young people, is also found at every level of modern society, in rural as well as urban areas, among both men and women, among all races and cultures. There is no country which is now immune from this modern scourge, either in the East or the West, in the northern or southern hemispheres, in the poorer or the richer countries. Many factors contribute to the dramatic increase in drug abuse. Surely a primary one is the breakdown of the family. In addition, there is a steady weakening of traditional ways of life which for generations have passed on cultural values and given meaning to daily existence; there are increasing tensions in human relationships, rising unemployment, sub-human standards of living, fears engendered by the threat of nuclear war and numerous other social factors, not the least of which is a psychological need to escape from the hardships and painful responsibilities of life. But at the root of this evil is the loss of ethical and spiritual values. If it is true that the youth of today are the greatest consumers of hard drugs, then it is legitimate to ask if this is due to the kind of society in which our young people are being reared. Drug abuse impoverishes every community where it exists. It diminishes human strength and moral fibre. It undermines esteemed values. It destroys the will to live and to contribute to a better society. Drug abuse is indeed a scourge, just as much as a famine, a drought or an epidemic. Every year it reaps an increasing harvest of human lives. But the modern plague of drug addiction has not gone entirely unchecked or unopposed. We cannot close our eyes to the immensity of the evil inflicted on humanity by this tragic problem; but neither should we fail to see the many efforts, even heroic ones, which are being made to counter it. The United Nations Organization, as well as

other institutions both governmental and non-governmental, have called attention internationally and regionally to the consequences of drug abuse. Conventions have been held, studies have been undertaken and other means have been employed, and the Holy See has been pleased to take an active part in these initiatives. The continuing growth of the illegal production and sale of drugs makes even more urgent the duty to expand those initiatives which seem now to be achieving concrete and positive results. It is imperative that the criminal activity of drug production and trafficking should be directly opposed and ultimately stopped. In this regard, my encouragement and admiration go to all those countries in which government leaders and citizens are truly committed to combatting the production, sale and misuse of drugs, sometimes paying a very high price, even sacrificing their own physical integrity. And I applaud all those who are working with equal determination to impart preventive education in the home, at school and in places of work. This requires some form of collaboration with agencies at the national and international level. But all of this would still not be sufficient if such political, legal and educational efforts were not accompanied by other initiatives, such as making crop substitution a feasible alternative in areas where illicit plant cultivation seems to be the only profitable or viable option available to the farmer. To provide such an alternative requires comprehensive rural development programmes, with stable infrastructures, appropriate technology and the fundamental community facilities of health care, education and so forth. Clearly, the problem of drug addiction and illicit trafficking is not unrelated to the question of human development. Special consideration must also be given to the treatment and rehabilitation of those who have become addicted to drugs or dependent on them in an unhealthy way. This requires the establishment and maintenance of institutions which can meet the specific needs of each individual victim of drug abuse. The great variety of needs represented requires the possibility of a threefold treatment: medical, social and legal. In this, the Church is ready to be of assistance, especially through the centres which she has herself established and by her cooperation with centres which are provided by other agencies. A key factor in successful rehabilitation, particularly in the case of young people, is the restoration of self-confidence and a healthy self-esteem, which provide fresh motivation based on solid moral and spiritual values. Drug abusers must be helped to re-establish trusting relationships with their family and friends. They must also be helped to resume their work, education or job-training. Families play a vital role in this process, as do educational, social and cultural institutions. Rehabilitation requires team work, and thus each of these should collaborate willingly with families and all concerned. I assure you that the Church wishes to offer every possible support to the many and varied efforts being made. And I wish to add a word of personal encouragement to you and the Governments and organizations that you represent. The common struggle against the plague of drug abuse and illicit trafficking is motivated by a serious spirit of mission, on behalf of humanity and for the very future of society, a mission whose success demands a mutual commitment and generous response on the part of all. May God bless your efforts and may this Conference be for the rest of the world a beacon of encouragement and hope. *From the Vatican, 4 June 1987.*

IOANNES PAULUS PP. II

