



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE WORLD JURIST ASSOCIATION
OF THE WORLD PEACE THROUGH LAW CENTER***

*Consistory Hall
Saturday, 9 May 1992*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I am pleased to welcome to the Vatican the "*World Jurist Association of the World Peace through Law Center*" on the occasion of World Law Day. For thirty-five years, your Association has been committed to the establishment of international peace through the development of structures capable of protecting rights and resolving conflicts through the rule of law. I assure you of the Church's great interest in your work and of her appreciation for your dedicated efforts to promote the cause of justice in international life. Concretely, the Holy See has been close to your endeavours by being represented at your assemblies and hopes that a more fruitful collaboration can be fostered in the future.

In our time, the human family has become increasingly aware of its interdependence, and has witnessed the providential rise of a deepened sense of solidarity between peoples and a greater concern for the welfare of all peoples and of every individual (Cf. John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 38). Organizations like your own reflect this growing awareness of a *moral imperative of solidarity* and play an important role in translating it into effective action.

2. Because, as the Scriptures observe, peace is always the work of justice (Cf. Is. 32:17), efforts to attain lasting peace in the world must be linked to the patient and persistent defence of fundamental human rights. Among the primary aims of law must be to ensure that each person receives his due, at every level of social life. The recognition that *the human person is by nature the subject of certain rights which no individual, group or State may violate* represents a significant juridical achievement and must be considered an essential principle of international law. In the

face of every attempt to deny or modify this truth, I express my hope that your Association will work to develop ever more sound and convincing arguments for the existence of these inviolable rights, to uphold them wherever they are threatened, and to urge the establishment of more effective instances for their defence.

3. As I wrote in the Encyclical "[Centesimus Annus](#)", "If there is no transcendent truth, in obedience to which man achieves his full identity, then there is no sure principle for guaranteeing just relations between people" (John Paul II, [Centesimus Annus, 44](#)). Your efforts to lay secure foundations for world peace through law must convince you of *the need to respect the demands of truth, especially the truth about man himself, in the workings of any legal system*. Indeed, as I said to your Association on another occasion, "the whole history of law shows that law loses its stability and its moral authority... whenever it ceases to search for the truth concerning man" (*Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, II, 2 (1979) 367). The tragic consequences of disregard for truth have been especially evident in our own century, in regimes which have sought systematically to suppress the truth, presuming to deprive people of their inalienable rights in the name of some higher justice, or showing a readiness to sacrifice the rights of individuals to the rights of the State and its programmes. But such consequences are also apparent today in a dangerous *moral relativism* which would lead some to view the common good of society as merely a sum of particular interests, and to consider profound ethical issues in narrow partisan terms, to be resolved by an appeal to public opinion or electoral advantage.

4. The role of religion in enlightening consciences regarding the spiritual and transcendent nature of human life cannot be ignored or underestimated. Indeed, in any consideration of fundamental human rights, *a primary place must always be accorded to freedom of religion*, which is in a sense their "source and synthesis" (John Paul II, [Centesimus Annus, 47](#)), inasmuch as it involves the right of each individual to seek the truth in accordance with his conscience and to live in conformity with that truth, in a spirit of respect and tolerance for others. This moment of history is marked on the one hand by the liberation of whole peoples from oppression and on the other by the unfortunate resurgence of old hostilities between certain ethnic and religious groups. There is an urgent need to strengthen, within an internationally recognized legal order, the juridical means to protect the rights of individuals and groups, including the right to freedom of religion, and to foster respect for the significant contribution which believers can make to the building of a peaceful society.

5. Dear friends: in your efforts to lay the groundwork for a more effective juridical organization of the international community, I invite you once more to consider the importance of respecting and duly safeguarding those *moral and spiritual truths necessary for an adequate defence of the dignity and freedom of individuals, peoples and nations*. I pray that the work of your Association will continue to advance the growth of a juridical culture worthy of humanity. I hope that it will contribute to the establishment of that "civilization of love" in which each human being is able to enjoy the respect, freedom and peace needed to respond to his lofty calling. Upon all of you I

cordially invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty God.

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