



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO ASSISI

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE REPRESENTATIVES OF
THE EUROPEAN ISLAMIC COMMUNITY**

*Sacred Convent of Saint Francis - Assisi (Perugia)
Sunday, 10 January 1993*

Dear Muslim Brothers and Friends,

1. Perhaps it can be said that no other Saint of the Church has sung the praises of peace and of the universal brotherhood of all God's children as has Saint Francis of Assisi. We are gathered here, in the town of his birth and death, to implore peace for the peoples of this continent of Europe, and especially for the Balkan countries. I wish to thank you, distinguished leaders of the Islamic community in Europe, for having accepted the invitation to take part in this Day of Prayer. We have prayed, and it is our deepest hope, that 1993 will be a year of peace everywhere, not excluding any area of the world where conflicts are taking place.

2. In the testimonies given yesterday evening, we heard how greatly people are suffering in the war-torn regions of the Balkans. The most tragic aspect of that war, as of every war, is the fact that those who are suffering most are ordinary citizens—parents, elderly people, women, children—people who simply want to bring up their families, do their work, lead their lives and perform their religious duties in peace. It is these people, whose voices are too seldom heard on the international stage, who must claim our first attention.

We stand in solidarity with these victims of oppression, hatred and atrocities, with all those whose villages have been burned and bombed, with those who flee their homes and take refuge elsewhere, with those unjustly arrested and placed in camps. Both Christianity and Islam inculcate in us a commitment to persevere in the pursuit of justice and peace for them and for all victims of

conflict.

We have also heard testimonies regarding cooperation on behalf of those in need. In the face of so much suffering how can anyone fail to react? Since all human beings have been created by God, and all are members of the one human family, we have a duty to come to the aid of all.

3. We have gathered together to place ourselves as humble suppliants before Almighty God. To our prayers we have added an act of fasting. Can we not see in this a double sign: that we acknowledge our own weakness, and that we are open to divine assistance? Our prayers for peace include the plea that we too may be strengthened to act always as peace-makers.

In this respect, the call of the Second Vatican Council for Christians and Muslims to work together remains valid today: "For the benefit of all humankind, let them together preserve and promote social justice, moral values, peace and freedom" (*Nostra Aetate*, 3). Again I assure you that the Catholic Church is desirous and ready to continue to cooperate with Muslims in these various domains. May God bless the initiatives already taken in this sense, and may he strengthen our willingness to continue to work together.

Your presence in Assisi on this occasion is of great significance: it proclaims that genuine religious belief is a source of mutual understanding and harmony, and that only the perversion of religious sentiment leads to discrimination and conflict. To use religion as an excuse for injustice and violence is a terrible abuse, and it must be condemned by all true believers in God.

4. You have come to this Day of Prayer from various countries of Europe. You have come because you desire peace with justice for all the peoples who live on this continent. You are concerned, as Christians are, about forms of racism and ethnic hatred which seem to be on the rise. These are evil, and we who believe in God and want to do his will must forcefully condemn such wrongdoing, whenever and wherever it appears in the world.

There can be no genuine peace unless believers stand together in rejecting the politics of hate and discrimination, and in affirming the right to religious and cultural freedom in all human societies.

In thanking you for your presence, I take the opportunity to offer to you and to the Islamic communities which you represent my prayerful best wishes. May Almighty God bless our efforts to serve the cause of justice and peace.

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