



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO MEMBERS OF THE DELEGATION OF THE HOLY SEE
TO THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN****

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Tuesday, 29 August 1995*

*Dear Mrs Glendon and Members of the Delegation of the Holy See
to the Fourth World Conference on Women,*

As you prepare to leave for Beijing, I am happy to meet you, the Head of the Delegation of the Holy See to the Fourth World Conference on Women, and the other Members of the Delegation. Through you, I extend my best wishes and prayers to the Secretary General of the Conference, to the participant nations and organizations, as well as to the authorities of the host country, the People's Republic of China.

My wishes are for the success of this Conference in its aim to guarantee all the women of the world "equality, development and peace", through full respect for their equal dignity and for their inalienable human rights, so that they can make their full contribution to the good of society.

Over the past months, on various occasions, I have drawn attention to the positions of the Holy See and to the teaching of the Catholic Church on the dignity, rights and responsibilities of women in today's society: in the family, in the workplace, in public life. I have drawn inspiration from the life and witness of great women within the Church throughout the centuries who have been pioneers within society, as mothers, as workers, as leaders in the social and political fields, in the caring professions and as thinkers and spiritual leaders.

The Secretary General of the United Nations has asked the participating nations at the Beijing Conference to announce concrete commitments for the improvement of the condition of women. Having looked at the various needs of women in today's world, the Holy See wishes to make a

specific option regarding such a commitment: an option in favour of girls and young women.

Therefore, I call all Catholic caring and educational institutions to adopt a concerted and priority strategy directed to girls and young women, especially to the poorest, over the coming years.

It is disheartening to note that in today's world, the simple fact of being a female, rather than a male, can reduce the likelihood of being born or of surviving childhood; it can mean receiving less adequate nutrition and health care, and it can increase the chance of remaining illiterate and having only limited access, or none at all, even to primary education.

Investment in the care and education of girls, as an equal right, is a fundamental key to the advancement of women. It is for this reason that today:

- I appeal to all the educational services linked to the Catholic Church to guarantee equal access for girls, to educate boys to a sense of women's dignity and worth, to provide additional possibilities for girls who have suffered disadvantage, and to identify and remedy the reasons which cause girls to drop out of education at an early stage;

- I appeal to those institutions which are involved in health care, especially primary health care, to make improved basic health care and education for girls a hallmark of their service;

- I appeal to the Church's charitable and development organizations to give priority in the allocation of resources and personnel to the special needs of girls;

- I appeal to Congregations of Religious Sisters, in fidelity to the special charism and mission given to them by their Founders, to identify and reach out to those girls and young women who are most on the fringes of society, who have suffered most, physically and morally, who have the least opportunity. Their work of healing, caring and educating, and of reaching to the poorest is needed in every part of the world today;

- I appeal to Catholic Universities and centres of higher education to ensure that, in the preparation of future leaders in society, they acquire a special sensitivity to the concerns of young women;

- I appeal to women and women's organizations within the Church and active in society to establish patterns of solidarity so that their leadership and guidance can be put at the service of girls and young women.

As followers of Jesus Christ, who identifies himself with the least among children, we cannot be insensitive to the needs of disadvantaged girls, especially those who are victims of violence and a lack of respect for their dignity.

In the spirit of those great Christian women who have enlightened the life of the Church throughout

the centuries and who have often called the Church back to her essential mission and service, I make an appeal to the women of the Church today to assume new forms of leadership in service and I appeal to all the institutions of the Church to welcome this contribution of women.

I appeal to all men in the Church to undergo, where necessary, a change of heart and to implement, as a demand of their faith, a positive vision of women. I ask them to become more and more aware of the disadvantages to which women, and especially girls, have been exposed and to see where the attitude of men, their lack of sensitivity or lack of responsibility may be at the root.

Once again, through you, I wish to express my good wishes to all those who have responsibility for the Beijing Conference and to assure them of my support, as well as that of the Holy See and the institutions of the Catholic Church, for a renewed commitment of all to the good of the world's women.

**Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. XVIII, 2 p. 260-263.

L'Osservatore Romano 30.8.1995 p.1.

L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English n.35 p.1.

Serving Human Family p. 425-427

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