



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE "INTERNATIONAL FORUM BETHLEHEM 2000"*

February 19, 1999

*Your Excellencies,
Dear Friends,*

I warmly welcome you this morning, the members of the Organizing Committee of the International Forum "Bethlehem 2000". I greet especially Ambassador Ibra Deguène Ka, Permanent Representative of Senegal to the United Nations and Chairman of the Committee, and Sir Kieran Prendergast, Under Secretary-General for Political Affairs and Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

The city of Bethlehem stirs memories reaching far back in the history of ancient Israel to the figure of King David (cf. 1 *Sam* 16:13). Yet it is the birth of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, which gives Bethlehem its unique place in the mind and heart of the world. The Gospel of Saint Luke reports that at the birth of Jesus angels sang of peace on earth to all people of good will (cf. *Lk* 2:14). And although Bethlehem's history since then has often been marked by violence, the city still stands as a promise of peace and an assurance that the human hope for peace is not vain.

The Great Jubilee which will celebrate the two thousandth anniversary of the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem invites us to look forward in hope to a world in which peace will be secure. We must all work for a future in which there will be no threat to peace from among the worshippers of the one God, from any who bear the name of Christian or Jew or Muslim. In particular, we must be confident that it is possible to build peace in the Middle East. The promise of peace made at Bethlehem will become a reality when the dignity and the rights of human beings made in the image of God (cf. *Gen* 1:26) are acknowledged and respected.

May the work of your Committee help to ensure that the birthplace of the One "who shepherds

God's people" (cf. *Mt 2:6*) will remind people everywhere that peace is God's gift from above. May the Lord's blessings assist you in this noble endeavour!

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