



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO THE MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS ACCREDITED TO THE HOLY SEE

*Sala Regia
Monday, 12 January 2015*

[Multimedia]

*Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I thank you for your presence at this traditional meeting, which allows me at the beginning of each new year to offer to you, your families, and the peoples you represent, my cordial greetings and best wishes. I am especially grateful to your Dean, Ambassador Jean-Claude Michel, for the kind words which he addressed to me in the name of all, and I thank each of you for your constant dedication and efforts to foster, in a spirit of mutual cooperation, relations between the countries and international organizations which you represent and the Holy See. In the course of the past year too, these relations were consolidated by an increase in the presence of ambassadors resident in Rome and by the signing of new bilateral Accords, both general, like that concluded last January with Cameroon, and specific, like those signed with Malta and Serbia.

Today I wish to repeat a word quite dear to us: peace! It comes to us from the angelic hosts who proclaimed it on Christmas night (cf. *Lk 2:14*) as a precious gift of God, while at the same time as a personal and social responsibility which calls for our commitment and concern. But together with peace, the image of the Christmas creche speaks to us another tragic reality: that of rejection. In some iconographic representations, both in the West and in the East – I think for example of the splendid Nativity icon of Andrej Rublev – the Child Jesus is shown not lying in a manger, but in a tomb. The image, which is meant to connect the two principal Christian feasts of Christmas and Easter, shows that the joyful acceptance of this new birth is inseparable from the entire drama of Jesus' life, his humiliation and rejection, even to death on the cross.

The Christmas stories themselves show us the hardened heart of a humanity which finds it difficult to accept the Child. From the very start, he is cast aside, left out in the cold, forced to be born in a stable since there was no room in the inn (cf. *Lk 2:7*). If this is how the Son of God was treated, how much more so is it the case with so many of our brothers and sisters! Rejection is an attitude we all share; it makes us see our neighbour not as a brother or sister to be accepted, but as unworthy of our attention, a rival, or someone to be bent to our will. This is the mindset which fosters that “throwaway culture” which spares nothing and no one: nature, human beings, even God himself. It gives rise to a humanity filled with pain and constantly torn by tensions and conflicts of every sort.

Emblematic of this, in the Gospel infancy narratives, is King Herod. Feeling his authority threatened by the Child Jesus, he orders all the children of Bethlehem to be killed. We think immediately of Pakistan, where a month ago, more than a hundred children were slaughtered with unspeakable brutality. To their families I wish to renew my personal condolences and the assurance of my continued prayers for the many innocents who lost their lives.

The personal dimension of rejection is inevitably accompanied by a social dimension, a culture of rejection which severs the deepest and most authentic human bonds, leading to the breakdown of society and spawning violence and death. We see painful evidence of this in the events reported daily in the news, not least the tragic slayings which took place in Paris a few days ago. Other people “are no longer regarded as beings of equal dignity, as brothers or sisters sharing a common humanity, but rather as objects” (*Message for the 2015 World Day of Peace*, 8 December 2014, 4). Losing their freedom, people become enslaved, whether to the latest fads, or to power, money, or even deviant forms of religion. These are dangers which I pointed out in my recent Message for the World Day of Peace, which dealt with the issue of today’s multiple forms of enslavement. All of them are born of a corrupt heart, a heart incapable of recognizing and doing good, of pursuing peace.

It saddens us to see the tragic consequences of this mentality of rejection and this “culture of enslavement” (ibid., 2) in the never-ending spread of conflicts. Like a true world war fought piecemeal, they affect, albeit in different forms and degrees of intensity, a number of areas in our world, beginning with nearby Ukraine, which has become a dramatic theatre of combat. It is my hope that through dialogue the efforts presently being made to end the hostilities will be consolidated, and that the parties involved will embark as quickly as possible, in a renewed spirit of respect for international law, upon the path of mutual trust and fraternal reconciliation, with the aim of bringing an end to the present crisis.

My thoughts turn above all to the Middle East, beginning with the beloved land of Jesus which I had the joy of visiting last May, and for whose peace we constantly pray. We did this with extraordinary intensity, together with the then President of Israel, Shimon Peres, and the President of Palestine, Mahmoud Abbas, inspired by a confident hope that negotiations between the two

parties will once more resume, for the sake of ending violence and reaching a solution which can enable Palestinians and Israelis alike to live at last in peace within clearly established and internationally recognized borders, thus implementing the “two state solution”.

The Middle East is tragically embroiled in other conflicts which have lasted far too long, with chilling repercussions, due also to the spread of fundamentalist terrorism in Syria and in Iraq. This phenomenon is a consequence of the throwaway culture being applied to God. Religious fundamentalism, even before it eliminates human beings by perpetrating horrendous killings, eliminates God himself, turning him into a mere ideological pretext. In the face of such unjust aggression, which also strikes Christians and other ethnic and religious groups in the region – the Yazidis for example – a unanimous response is needed, one which, within the framework of international law, can end the spread of acts of violence, restore harmony and heal the deep wounds which the ongoing conflicts have caused. Here, in your presence, I appeal to the entire international community, as I do to the respective governments involved, to take concrete steps to bring about peace and to protect all those who are victims of war and persecution, driven from their homes and their homeland. In a letter written shortly before Christmas, I sought to express my personal closeness and the promise of my prayers to all the Christian communities of the Middle East. Theirs is a precious testimony of faith and courage, for they play a fundamental role as artisans of peace, reconciliation and development in the civil societies of which they are a part. A Middle East without Christians would be a marred and mutilated Middle East! In urging the international community not to remain indifferent in the face of this situation, I express my hope that religious, political and intellectual leaders, especially those of the Muslim community, will condemn all fundamentalist and extremist interpretations of religion which attempt to justify such acts of violence.

Sadly, comparable acts of brutality, which not infrequently reap victims from among the poor and the most vulnerable, are found in other parts of the world as well. I think in particular of Nigeria where acts of violence continue to strike indiscriminately and there is a constant increase in the tragic phenomenon of kidnappings, often of young girls carried off to be made objects of trafficking. This is an abominable trade which must not continue! It is a scourge which needs to be eradicated, since it strikes all of us, from individual families to the entire international community (cf. [*Address to Newly Accredited Ambassadors to the Holy See*](#), 12 December 2013).

I also look with concern to the many civil conflicts taking place in other parts of Africa, beginning with Libya, ravaged by a drawn-out internecine war which has caused unspeakable suffering among its people, with grave repercussions for the delicate balances in the region. I think of the dramatic situation in the Central African Republic, in which, sad to say, the good will inspiring the efforts of those seeking to build a future of peace, security and prosperity, has encountered resistance and selfish partisan interests. These risk frustrating the hopes of a people which has endured so much and which now longs to shape its future in freedom. Of particular concern, too, is the situation in South Sudan and in some areas of Sudan, the Horn of Africa and the Democratic

Republic of the Congo, where civilian casualties are on the rise and thousands of persons, including many women and children, are being forced to flee and to endure conditions of extreme distress. I voice my hope for a common commitment on the part of individual governments and the international community to end every form of fighting, hatred and violence, and to pursue reconciliation, peace and the defence of the transcendent dignity of the person.

Nor can we overlook the fact that wars involve another horrendous crime, the crime of rape. This is a most grave offense against the dignity of women, who are not only violated in body but also in spirit, resulting in a trauma hard to erase and with effects on society as well. Sadly, even apart from situations of war, all too many women even today are victims of violence.

Every conflict and war is emblematic of the throwaway culture, since people's lives are deliberately crushed by those in power. Yet that culture is also fuelled by more subtle and insidious forms of rejection. I think in the first place of the way the sick are treated; often they are cast aside and marginalized like the lepers in the Gospel. Among the lepers of our own day we can count the victims of the new and terrible outbreak of Ebola which, especially in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea, has already taken over six thousand lives. Today I wish publicly to praise and thank those healthcare workers who, alongside men and women religious and volunteers, are caring in every way possible for the sick and their families, especially orphaned children. At the same time I renew my appeal to the entire international community to provide adequate humanitarian assistance to patients and to make concerted efforts to combat the disease.

Together with lives thrown away because of war and disease, there are those of numerous refugees and displaced persons. Once again, the reality can be appreciated by reflecting on the childhood of Jesus, which sheds light on another form of the throwaway culture which harms relationships and causes the breakdown of society. Indeed, because of Herod's brutality, the Holy Family was forced to flee to Egypt, and was only able to return several years later (cf. *Mt* 2:13-15). One consequence of the situations of conflict just described is the flight of thousands of persons from their homeland. At times they leave not so much in search of a better future, but any future at all, since remaining at home can mean certain death. How many persons lose their lives during these cruel journeys, the victims of unscrupulous and greedy thugs? I raised this issue during my recent visit to the European Parliament, where I insisted that "we cannot allow the Mediterranean to become a vast cemetery" (*Address to the European Parliament*, Strasbourg, 25 November 2014). Then too there is the alarming fact that many immigrants, especially in the Americas, are unaccompanied children, all the more at risk and in need of greater care, attention and protection.

Often coming without documents to strange lands whose language they do not speak, migrants find it difficult to be accepted and to find work. In addition to the uncertainties of their flight, they have to face the drama of rejection. A change of attitude is needed on our part, moving from indifference and fear to genuine acceptance of others. This of course calls for "enacting adequate legislation to protect the rights of... citizens and to ensure the acceptance of immigrants" (ibid.). I

thank all those who, even at the cost of their lives, are working to assist refugees and immigrants, and I urge states and international organizations to make every effort to resolve these grave humanitarian problems and to provide the immigrants' countries of origin with forms of aid which can help promote their social and political development and settle their internal conflicts, which are the chief cause of this phenomenon. "We need to take action against the causes and not only the effects" (ibid.). This will also enable immigrants to return at some point to their own country and to contribute to its growth and development.

Together with immigrants, displaced people and refugees, there are many other "hidden exiles" ([*Angelus, 29 December 2013*](#)) living in our homes and in our families. I think especially of the elderly, the handicapped and young people. The elderly encounter rejection when they are considered a "burdensome presence" (ibid.), while the young are thrown away when they are denied concrete prospects of employment to build their future. Indeed, there is no poverty worse than that which takes away work and the dignity of work (cf. [*Address to Participants in the World Meeting of Popular Movements*](#), 28 October 2014), or which turns work into a form of enslavement. This is what I sought to stress during my recent meeting with popular movements working to finding adequate solutions to some of today's problems, including the scourge of rising unemployment among the young, illegal labour, and the dramatic situation of so many workers, especially children, who are exploited out of greed. All this is contrary to human dignity and the fruit of a mentality which is centred on money, benefits and economic profit, to the detriment of our fellow man.

Then too, the family itself is not infrequently considered disposable, thanks to the spread of an individualistic and self-centred culture which severs human bonds and leads to a dramatic fall in birth rates, as well as legislation which benefits various forms of cohabitation rather than adequately supporting the family for the welfare of society as a whole.

Among the causes of these realities is a model of globalization which levels out differences and even discards cultures, cutting them off from those factors which shape each people's identity and constitute a legacy essential to their sound social development. In a drab, anonymous world, it is easy to understand the difficulties and the discouragement felt by many people who have literally lost the sense of being alive. This tragic situation is aggravated by the continuing economic crisis, which fosters pessimism and social conflict. I have been able to see its effects here in Rome, where I meet many people in trying situations, and in the various journeys I have made in Italy.

To the beloved Italian nation, then, I would like to express my hope that in the continuing climate of social, political and economic uncertainty the Italian people will not yield to apathy or dissension, but will rediscover those values of shared concern and solidarity which are at the basis of their culture and civic life, and are a reason for confidence both now and in the future, especially for the young.

Speaking of the young, I wish to mention [my journey to Korea](#), where last August I met thousands of young people assembled for the Sixth Asian Youth Day. There I spoke of the need to treasure our young, “seeking to pass on the legacy of the past and to apply it to the challenges of the present” ([Meeting with Authorities](#), 14 August 2014). This demands that we reflect on “how well we are transmitting our values to the next generation and on the kind of world and society we are preparing to hand on to them” (ibid.).

This evening I will have the joy of setting off once more for Asia, to visit Sri Lanka and the Philippines as a sign of my interest and pastoral concern for the people of that vast continent. To them and to their governments I wish to voice yet again the desire of the Holy See to offer its own contribution of service to the common good, to harmony and social concord. In particular, I express my hope for a resumption of dialogue between the two Koreas, sister countries which speak the same language.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the beginning of a new year, though, we do not wish our outlook to be dominated by pessimism, or the defects and deficiencies of the present time. We also want to thank God for the gifts and blessings he has bestowed upon us, for the occasions of dialogue and encounter which he has granted us, and for the fruits of peace which he has enabled us to savour.

I experienced an eloquent sign that the culture of encounter is possible during [my visit to Albania](#), a nation full of young people who represent hope for the future. Despite the painful events of its recent history, the country is marked by the “peaceful coexistence and collaboration that exists among followers of different religions” ([Address to Authorities](#), Tirana, 21 September 2014), in an atmosphere of respect and mutual trust between Catholics, Orthodox and Muslims. This is an important sign that sincere faith in God makes one open to others, generates dialogue and works for the good, whereas violence is always the product of a falsification of religion, its use as a pretext for ideological schemes whose only goal is power over others. Similarly, in my recent journey to Turkey, a historic bridge between East and West, I was able to see the fruits of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, as well as efforts made to assist refugees from other countries of the Middle East. I also encountered this spirit of openness in Jordan, which I visited at the beginning of my pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and in the testimonies which come from Lebanon, a country which I pray will overcome its current political problems.

One example close to my heart of how dialogue can build bridges comes from the recent decision of the United States of America and Cuba to end a lack of communication which has endured for more than half a century, and to initiate a rapprochement for the benefit of their respective citizens. Here I think too of the people of Burkina Faso, who are experiencing a period of significant political and institutional change, with the hope that a renewed spirit of cooperation will contribute to the growth of a more just and fraternal society. I also note with pleasure that last

March an agreement was signed to end long years of tension in the Philippines. I wish to encourage the efforts made to ensure a stable peace in Colombia, as well as the initiatives taken to restore political and social harmony in Venezuela. At the same time, I express my hope that a definitive agreement may soon be reached between Iran and the 5+1 Group regarding the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, and my appreciation of the efforts already made in this regard. I note with satisfaction the intention of the United States to close the Guantanamo detention facilities, while acknowledging the generous willingness of several countries to receive the detainees. I heartily thank those countries. Finally, I would like to express my appreciation and encouragement to those countries actively engaged in promoting human development, political stability and civil coexistence between their citizens.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On 6 August 1945, humanity witnessed one of the most horrendous catastrophes in its history. For the first time, in a new and unprecedented way, the world experienced the full potential of man's destructive power. From the ashes of that immense tragedy which was the Second World War, there arose among the nations a new will for dialogue and encounter which inspired the United Nations Organization, whose seventieth anniversary we will celebrate this year. In his visit to the UN headquarters fifty years ago, my predecessor, Pope Paul VI, noted that "the blood of millions, countless unheard-of sufferings, useless massacres and frightening ruins have sanctioned the agreement that unites you with an oath that ought to change the future of the world: never again war, never again war! It is peace, peace, that has to guide the destiny of the nations of all mankind" (*Address to the United Nations*, New York, 4 October 1965).

This is likewise my own hope-filled prayer for this new year, which, for that matter, will see the continuation of two significant processes: the drawing up of the Post-2015 Development Agenda, with the adoption of Sustainable Development Goals, and the drafting of a new Climate Change Agreement. The latter is urgently needed. The indispensable presupposition of all these is peace, which, even more than an end to all wars, is the fruit of heartfelt conversion.

With these sentiments, I once more offer to each of you, to your families and your peoples, my prayerful good wishes that this new year of 2015 will be one of hope and peace.