



The Holy See

***LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO HIS EXCELLENCY MR. RENÉ VALÉRY MONGBÉ***

To His Excellency

Mr. René Valéry Mongbé

President of the Conference Committee of the Path to Peace Foundation

1. On the occasion of the meeting devoted to the refugee question as “a challenge to solidarity”, through this message I want to join with you in making the voice of the victims of the many heartrending situations of our day heard within the context of the United Nations Organization. The vocation of this international organization is precisely that of expressing at the highest level the determination for cooperation and solidarity of the nations of the world, by its very nature it is called to uphold and protect the fundamental rights of every human person as well to promote the search for peace and the development of all peoples.

2. At present the various continents are experiencing the brutal uprooting of millions of people as a result of armed conflict, ethnic rivalry, the violation of the most basic human rights, religious persecution, or natural and man-made ecological disasters. Those who are refugees or displaced persons within their own countries or beyond their borders suffer the violation of their essential dignity, they are wounded in body and spirit and deprived of their rights, while the responsible for these conditions go unpunished.

3. In the eyes of the refugees, most- frequently women and children, I have been able to see the suffering of crushed lives and the anguish of disappointed hopes. Their outstretched hands in many of the countries I have visited beseeched me to support their hope, to cry justice for them and to tell the world that they have the right to a home, a land, a culture, and to enjoy these in peace, freedom and dignity. As I have said many a time, the suffering of refugees is “a wound which typifies and reveals the imbalances and conflicts of the modern world” (*Sollicitudo rei socialis*, n. 24),

You have chosen to base your reflection on the document published by the Pontifical Council “Cor Unum” and the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, Refugees. A Challenge to Solidarity. This document once again shows the Holy See’s interest in the problem,

4. In cooperation with many people of good will, the Church accompanies refugees in their exile through the work of her volunteers — priests, religious and laity — who offer their assistance, contribute to the education of their children, provide pastoral care and share their daily life, All these generous people and the organizations they have created give a witness of human solidarity and love for the least of our brothers and sisters, a testimony which shows the way to follow.

5. Although the international community is still working to remedy the consequences of decades of ideological confrontation, it also has to deal with the new mass displacement of populations caused by exaggerated nationalism, political instability and tribal warfare. Wars have even been started in order to cause a new exodus of populations, resorting to the immoral strategy of “ethnic cleansing’. There is a temptation to close the doors, to refuse to welcome people or even to be indifferent and to grow accustomed to the desperate situation and slow death of millions of refugees whose presence is an obvious sign of the inability to check violence and of a breakdown in fraternity.

You, however, know that only the path of reconciliation and dialogue leads to peace and allows for the reconstruction of harmonious relations. The document you are studying reminds us that «there will be refugees who are victims of the abuse of power so long as relations between persons and between nations are not based on a true capacity to accept one another more and more in diversity »(n 8).

6. Today more than ever before the international community is called to construct a more just and humane world in which peace will be strengthened, where minorities will be respected and people will enjoy the freedom to practice their religion and live without fear in their homes and homeland with the means necessary to support their families At the same time the assistance given to refugees must continue, as well as the development of the juridical protection of the various groups of forcibly displaced persons.

7. To my satisfaction I see that some progress has been made. Thanks to the many organizations devoted to their care, and the UN High Commission for Refugees has pride of place, the great number of refugees present in developing countries are receiving assistance in the form of emergency aid. The same organizations are also trying to provide economic and political support in the refugees’ country of origin so they may exercise their right to return, as well as in the host countries in order to facilitate their eventual integration -

A greater number of States now admit the appropriateness of an international statute on refugees and the necessity of sharing the burden of its concrete implementation.

Without a doubt you will reflect on the ever timely importance of the right to asylum, the right to settle in a new country, the right to return freely to one's homeland. You will take into consideration the fact that, although humanitarian aid is necessary, it is no substitute for political action. In order to solve the refugee problem the solidarity of all — States, NGOs and individuals — is needed to shatter the silence or indifference, to prevent the genocide of whole population and to find a political solution to the radical problems threatening large section of the human family.

On the eve of the third millennium, I feel impelled to issue a pressing appeal that a spirit of welcome and generous solidarity in respecting the rights of every human being may develop everywhere. If people are determined to act in this spirit effective cooperation will be possible and the available resources used to protect refugees; then too the energy indispensable for remedying the suffering of the forcibly uprooted will be found and a better future, one in which there are no more refugees, will be prepared.

In the sincere hope that your reflections and appeals will meet with understanding and be heard far and wide, I entrust your work to the merciful grace of the Lord and I ask him to bless you and all the world's refugees whom you seek to serve.

From the Vatican, 5 March 1993.

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