



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE REPRESENTATIVES OF ALL THE
NATIONAL COMMITTEES OF UNICEF***

1. This is the first time in the history of UNICEF that representatives of all the National Committees have met together to reflect on their task and mission. I am particularly happy to greet each of you, because, whatever your personal background or country of origin, the principal inspiration which has brought you together in these days is that of a genuine concern and interest in a *better life and a better future for all the children of our world*.

In that noble task you will always have the support of the Catholic Church in every part of the world. It could not be otherwise with a Church that receives her mission from Jesus Christ, who identified himself with the humblest when he said: "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me" (*Matth. 18, 5*).

The National Committees which you represent are a sign of the concern and anxieties of many of our fellow men and women - and indeed of many children - for the less fortunate children of the world. One of the original aspects of UNICEF's structure is that it recognizes that the task of successfully working for the good of children all over the world cannot be carried out effectively by a central international agency as it were in isolation, but requires the contribution and the participation of a broad range of the citizens of many countries. Only in this way is it possible to create an awareness of the deeper dimensions of the questions involved and to create that genuine network of human solidarity which is needed to provide integral solutions to those questions.

2. UNICEF was set up originally as an "emergency fund", but although the word "emergency" has been removed from the title, the fact remains that the situation of so many children in all parts of the world is more tragic than ever. Indeed, alongside situations in some parts of the world where children lack the most elementary physical necessities even for survival, new forms of suffering are emerging for the children of other parts of the world because of a moral and cultural crisis. As

a result of this, children lack that selfless love which it is their right to receive from their parents and without which they will never reach happiness and personal development. I am thinking for example of the suffering caused by the effects of the breakdown of so many families.

3. Our society in this latter part of the twentieth century calls a judgment upon itself when, despite all the technological and medical progress and the progress in communications, still every day so many of the weakest members of our society suffer and die because they lack simple and basic resources which could in fact be made available to them. And notwithstanding this fact, which due to the modern communications media no one can claim to be unaware of, many men and women still live and transmit a life style based on self-centred consumerism, on exaggerated possession and even on the waste of the earth's potential.

If we look at the question deeply, we see that the situation in which so many children are deprived of the basic means of survival is linked to a vision of life closed in on itself and which impedes self-giving and solidarity. One of the great crises of conscience of contemporary society is the disregard for the mystery and sacredness of the gift of *life*, which is all too easily manipulated in a manner which does not respect the true nature and destiny of the human person, or which would dare to suppress life itself at the moments in which it is most defenceless.

Today I appeal to you who have come to Rome as representative of the genuine anxieties of many of the people of our world, to see, as a fundamental element of your work for the good of children, the task of the *education of consciences* towards the full appreciation of the value of each and every human life, and especially of the most defenceless.

4. You realize well that - without underestimating the urgency of programmes aimed at ensuring the survival of children - your task must lead you further, towards offering all the children of the world the possibility of a genuine physical, moral and spiritual development from the beginning of life onwards.

In this context, the role of the family, and especially of mothers, is of the greatest importance. You know that the future human development of the child is linked with the health of the mother, right from the moment in which conception takes place, through pregnancy and in the earliest years of the development of the child. You know the value of a strong and loving family environment in which father and mother, brothers and sisters and relatives all contribute to helping the child acquire his or her personal, cultural and religious identity.

It is not possible to work for the good of the child without at the same time being in the front line of those who work for the family, helping all families to realize the potential that is theirs for the formation of mature persons, who will be the strength of the society of tomorrow.

Just a year ago, the Holy See presented to the international community and to all those concerned

with the mission of the family in today's world a *Charter of the Rights of the Family* aimed at reinforcing an awareness of the irreplaceable role and position of the family, which constitutes, much more than a mere juridical, social and economic unit, a community of love and solidarity, which is uniquely suited to teach and transmit cultural, ethical, social, spiritual and religious values, essential for the development and well-being of its own members and of society ("Charter of the Rights of the Family, Preamble E.). Any violation of the rights of the family, any policy which leads to the weakening of the institution of the family, cannot lead to the true human and cultural progress.

5. Human problems will only be resolved by solutions that are *integrally human*. To propose anything less would be to treat fellow human beings as possessing a lesser dignity than ourselves. For you, in your work, to overlook *spiritual values*, which are indeed part of the heritage of all the peoples of the world, would be to close the door on the total development of the child and to condemn him or her to a new form of poverty.

Your task involves bringing much needed material aid, especially to the people of the developing nations. One must never overlook, however, that these peoples, despite material poverty, possess a wealth of cultural values affecting human solidarity, love and life, and especially affecting the child. The good of mankind demands that these values not only be respected, but also fostered and recognized as signposts for the many who, by looking upon material progress as an end in itself, lose sight of the deeper values of life itself.

With these reflections which spring from the Christian understanding of life, which is above all a gift of God who is Life and Love, I wish God's blessing on your work and organizations, and on you and your families.

From the Vatican, 16 October 1984.

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