



# The Holy See

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APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO TOGO, IVORY COAST, CAMEROON,  
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC, ZAIRE, KENYA AND MOROCCO

**ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE MEMBERS  
OF THE AGENCY OF THE UNITED NATIONS\***

*Nairobi (Kenya)  
Sunday, 18 August 1985*

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

1. It is always an honour for me to visit one of the Agencies of the United Nations. The ever increasing importance of this prestigious Organisation becomes more evident every year. At no time in history has there been a greater need for dialogue and collaboration at the international level, and for joint efforts by nations to promote integral human development and to further justice and peace - precisely the goals to which the United Nations Organisation is dedicated.

I am very grateful then for the invitation to come to this Centre today, an invitation which was extended to me by Dr Mostafa K. Tolba, the Executive Director of *the United Nations Environment Programme*. In greeting him, I also greet the staff and all associated in the Agency's work. At the same time, I offer a cordial greeting to the staff of *Habitat: the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements*, also located here in Nairobi, and to its Executive Director, Dr Alcot Ramachandron.

2. For many years now, the Catholic Church has taken an active interest in questions concerning the environment. A Delegation of the Holy See participated in the Conference on the Environment held in Stockholm in 1972, the meeting which prepared the way for the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme. My predecessor, Pope Paul VI, sent a message to the Stockholm Conference, in which he said: "We would like to tell you and all the participants of the interest with which we follow this great enterprise. The care of preserving and improving the

natural environment, like the noble ambition of stimulating a first gesture of world co-operation in favour of this good necessary for everyone, meets needs that are deeply felt among the people of our times" (Pauli VI *Nuntius scripto datus ad Exc.mum Virum Mauricium Strong, secretarium generalem Conventus internationalis Consociatorum Natium de ambitu humano, Holmiae habiti, die 1 iun. 1972: Insegnamenti di Paolo VI, X (1972) 606 ss.*).

The Church's commitment to the conservation and improvement of our environment is linked to a command of God. In the very first pages of the Bible, we read how God created all things and then entrusted them to the care of human beings who were themselves created in his image. God said to Adam and Eve: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth" (*Gen. 1, 28*).

It is a requirement of our human dignity, and therefore a serious responsibility, to exercise dominion over creation in such a way that it truly serves the human family. Exploitation of the riches of nature must take place according to criteria that take into account not only the immediate needs of people but also the needs of future generations. In this way, the stewardship over nature, entrusted by God to man, will not be guided by short-sightedness or selfish pursuit; rather, it will take into account the fact that all created goods are directed to the good of all humanity. The use of natural resources must aim at serving the integral development of present and future generations. Progress in the field of ecology, and growing awareness of the need to protect and conserve certain non-renewable natural resources, are in keeping with the demands of true stewardship. *God is glorified when creation serves the integral development of the whole human family.*

3. With the rapid acceleration of science and technology in recent decades, the environment has been subjected to far greater changes than ever before. As a result, we are offered *many new opportunities for development* and human progress; we are now able to transform our surroundings greatly, even dramatically, for the enhancement of the quality of life. On the other hand, this new ability, unless it is used with wisdom and vision, can cause tremendous and even irreparable harm in the ecological and social spheres. *The capacity for improving the environment and the capacity for destroying it increase enormously each year.*

*The ultimate determining factor is the human person.* It is not science and technology, or the increasing means of economic and material development, but the human person, and especially groups of persons, communities and nations, *freely choosing* to face the problems together, who will, under God, determine the future. That is why whatever impedes human freedom or dishonours it, such as the evil of apartheid and all forms of prejudice and discrimination, is an affront to man's vocation to shape his own destiny. Eventually it will have repercussions in all areas requiring human freedom and as such can become a major stumbling block to the improvement of the environment and all of society.

*Threats to the environment* today are numerous: deforestation, water and air pollution, soil erosion, desertification, acid rain and many more. Ecological problems are especially acute in the tropical regions of the world, and in particular here in Africa. Nearly all the nations affected by these problems are developing nations which are, with great difficulty, undergoing various stages of industrialisation. A severe shortage of energy and natural resources impedes progress and results in harsh living conditions. And the problems are often complicated by the tropical environment which makes people especially susceptible to serious endemic diseases.

Since every country has its own particular set of problems and varying amounts of natural resources, it is easy to see the difference between the problems faced by *developing nations* and those of *developed nations*. While modern industry and technology offer great hope of advancement, steps must be taken to ensure that the economic, material and social development which are so important include proper consideration of the impact on the environment, both immediate and in the future.

4. The Catholic Church approaches the care and protection of the environment from the point of view of *the human person*. It is our conviction, therefore, that all ecological programmes must respect the full dignity and freedom of whoever might be affected by such programmes. Environment problems should be seen in relation to the needs of actual men and women, their families, their values, their unique social and cultural heritage. For the ultimate purpose of environment programmes is to enhance the quality of human life, *to place creation in the fullest way possible at the service of the human family*.

5. Perhaps nowhere do we see more clearly the *interrelatedness of the world* today than in questions concerning the environment. The growing interdependence between individuals and between nations is keenly felt when it is a question of facing natural disasters such as droughts, typhoons, floods and earthquakes. The consequences of these stretch far beyond the regions directly affected. And the vastness and complexity of many ecological problems demand not only a combined response at local and national levels but also *substantial assistance and coordination from the international community*. As Pope Paul VI wrote to the Stockholm Conference: "Interdependence must now be met by joint responsibility; common destiny by solidarity". One could hardly overstate the international character of ecological problems or the international benefits of their solution.

These problems often require the expertise and assistance of scientists and technicians from industrialised countries. Yet the latter cannot solve them without the cooperation at every step of scientists and technicians from the countries being helped. *The transfer of technological skills* to developing countries cannot be expected to have lasting results if training is not provided for technicians and scientists from these countries themselves. *The training of local personnel* makes it possible to adapt technology in a way that fully respects the cultural and social fabric of the local communities. Local experts possess the necessary bonds with their own people to ensure a

balanced sensitivity to local values and needs. They can evaluate the continuing validity of the newly transferred skills. Only when this trained personnel finally exists locally can one speak of full collaboration between countries.

6. I would now like to say a few words to those engaged in the work of the *United Nations Centre for Human Settlements*, and to all who are trying to improve the living conditions of the poor and provide shelter for the homeless. This work is of course closely related to the ecological problems of which I have been speaking. In fact it is at its very heart. As Pope Paul VI stated in his message to the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements in Vancouver in 1976: "The home, that is to say, the centre of warmth in which the family is united and the children grow in love, must remain the first concern of every programme relative to the human environment" (Pauli VI *Epistula ad Exc.mum Virum Berney Danson Canadensem Administrum pro Urbanis Negotiis eundemque Praesidem Conferentiae Unitarum Nationum in urbe Vancouverio instructae ad dignas hominum fovendas habitationes*, die 24 maii 1976: *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, XIV (1976) 401 ss.). For this reason, the Church's primary concern for the human person in problems of the environment includes the problems of housing and shelter as well.

Those who believe in Jesus Christ cannot forget his words: "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head" (*Matth.* 8, 20). Thus we see in the faces of the homeless the face of Christ the Lord. And we feel impelled, by love of him and by his example of generous self-giving, to seek to do everything we can to help those living in conditions unworthy of their human dignity. At the same time, we gladly join hands with all people of good will in the worthy efforts being made to provide adequate housing for the millions of people in today's world living in absolute destitution. Nor can we remain passive or indifferent as the rapid increase of *urbanisation and industrialisation* creates complex problems of housing and the environment. I assure you then of the Church's great interest in and support for your commendable endeavours to provide housing for the homeless and to safeguard the human dimension of all settlements of people.

7. Five years ago, on the occasion of my first Pastoral Visit to Africa, I went to Ouagadougou in the heart of the Sahel region and there launched a solemn appeal on behalf of all those suffering from the devastating drought. In the wake of that appeal there was a most generous response, so generous in fact that it became possible to set up a special programme to assist the suffering in a more formal way. Thus, the John Paul II Foundation for the Sahel was officially begun in February 1984. This Foundation is a sign of the Church's love for the men, women and children who have been stricken by this continuing tragedy. Even though the project seems small and inadequate in the face of such vast needs, nonetheless it is a concrete effort to help the people there and to contribute in some degree to the future of the African continent, a future which ultimately rests in the hands of the African peoples themselves.

I wish to take this opportunity to renew my solemn appeal on behalf of the people of the Sahel and

of other critical regions where the drought is still continuing and there is a clear *need for international assistance and solidarity* in order to provide food, drink and shelter and to solve the conflicts which are hindering efforts to help. Thus I repeat what I said in Ouagadougou five years ago: "I cannot be silent when my brothers and sisters are threatened. I become here the voice of those who have no voice, the voice of the innocent, who died because they lacked water and bread; the voice of fathers and mothers who saw their children die without understanding, or who will always see in their children the after-effects of the hunger they have suffered; the voice of the generations to come, who must no longer live with this terrible threat weighing upon their lives. I launch an appeal to everyone! Let us not wait until the drought returns, terrible and devastating! Let us not wait for the sand to bring death again! Let us not allow the future of these peoples to remain jeopardized for ever"! (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Vehemens incitamentum ad homines aquarum penuria afflictos sublevandos, in urbe Uagaduguensi ante cathedrale templum elatum*, 7, die 10 maii 1980: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, III, 1 (1980) 1295) The solidarity shown in the past has proved, by its extent and effectiveness, that it is possible to make a difference. Let our response now be even more generous and effective.

Two kinds of assistance are needed: assistance which meets the *immediate needs* of food and shelter, and assistance which will make it possible for the people now suffering to resume responsibility for their own lives, to reclaim their land and to make it once more capable of providing a stable, healthy way of life. Such *long-range programmes* make it possible for people to regain hope for the future and a feeling of dignity and self-worth.

8. Ladies and Gentlemen, as I speak to you today, I am reminded of the words of Paul VI which have become so well known: "Development is the new name for peace" (Pauli VI *Populorum Progressio*, 87). Yes, indeed, *integral development is a condition for peace*, and environment programmes for food and housing are *concrete ways of promoting peace*. All who serve the basic needs of their neighbours contribute building blocks to the great edifice of peace.

*Peace is built* slowly through good will, trust and persevering effort. It is built by international agencies and by governmental and non-governmental organisations when they engage *in common efforts to provide food and shelter* for the needy, and when they work together *to improve the environment*.

Peace is built by Heads of States and politicians when they rise above divisive ideologies and cooperate in joint efforts free of prejudice, discrimination, hatred and revenge. *Peace is the fruit of reconciliation*, and the peace of Africa depends also on the reconciliation of people in each individual country. It requires the solidarity of all Africans as brothers and sisters at the service of the whole African family and at the service of the integral development of all mankind.

Peace is built up when national budgets are finally diverted from the creation of more powerful and deadlier weapons to provide food and raw materials to meet basic human needs. And peace is

consolidated with each passing year as the use of nuclear weapons becomes a fading memory in the conscience of humanity. And today we thank God again that forty years have passed without the use of those weapons that devastated human life, together with its environment and shelter, in Hiroshima and Nagasaki - forty years of hope and determination, forty years in a new era for humanity.

Peace is built by the men and women of *the mass media* when they bring to the attention of the public the facts about those who suffer, about refugees and the dispossessed, when they stir up in others a determination and generosity to respond to all those in need. Yes, "*development*" and "*a new heart*" are new names for peace. And those who make peace and promote conditions for peace shall for ever be called children of God!

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\*AAS 78 (1986), p. 89-95.

*Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. VIII, 2 p. 477-484.

*L'Osservatore Romano* 21.8.1985 p. XLVI-XLVII.

*L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English* n. 34 p. 7, 8.

*Paths to Peace* pp. 54-57.

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