



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS ACCREDITED TO THE HOLY SEE*

Saturday, 9 January 1988

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I am very grateful to your Dean, His Excellency Mr Joseph Amichia, for having just expressed your best wishes to me with great tact and with deep trust in the successor of Peter. With a sensitivity conferred by faith, he was able to evoke some events of great importance to the Church, while suggesting their connection with the present history of humanity. As an observer who is both wise and concerned for the good of all countries, particularly the most needy, he also noted the human problems that continue to trouble so many people. These difficulties in effect are like so many shadows and handicaps to be overcome so that the populations concerned may live this new year in peace. We also well know that it is a question of all peoples working in solidarity.

For my part, I too wish to express my wishes within this context of present realities. But first I want to extend cordial good wishes to all the members of the Diplomatic Corps here present, with a special word of welcome to the Ambassadors who are taking part in this gathering for the first time. I would like to note that the first Ambassador from Guinea Bissau has just recently begun his mission. On Christmas and New Year's Day, I remembered all of you in prayer, as well as your families and the nations you represent. Your governments have sought to establish stable diplomatic relations with the Holy See, which has an essentially spiritual mission, that is to say, one oriented towards the total good of individuals and of peoples in accordance with God's plan. May God preserve all of you and your compatriots in peace.

2. I will develop this annual message for the new year around some international events, including the negotiations on disarmament at the end of last year in Washington, and the fortieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which we celebrate this year. Disarmament, justice in safeguarding the rights of individuals and of peoples, and development

are, in effect, three conditions for peace.

But these important points cannot allow us to forget the harsh conflicts that still split apart peoples or entire regions. No one can remain indifferent in the face of these conflicts that every day threaten or extinguish human lives, destroy the social or cultural patrimony of an entire people, stifling it or hindering it from freely progressing towards its development. Certainly the first responsibility belongs to the governments directly involved. But they must know that all of humanity suffers and is humiliated by the evils which overwhelm one part of its members, and that with them it seeks a favourable and humane solution.

Some of the peoples involved can invoke the reasons they have for an armed response to attacks, resorting to the morally acceptable distinction between legitimate defence and unjustified aggression. But motives are often very complex, and in any case, situations arise in which the escalation is such that it surpasses all limits and finally proves to be unjust because it is deadly and ruinous for the different parties.

All of us are mindful of the conflict between Iraq and Iran, where it is urgent to put an end to an inhumane combat that is terribly destructive, we may even say senseless. In fact, many other countries are concerned with this conflict. It is time for them to cooperate sincerely so that hostilities may cease, especially with the help of the institutions of the international community.

Afghanistan merits equal attention. For eight years, we have witnessed the tragedy of its people whose life, formerly peaceful, has been subjected to incredible changes and to considerable human losses, while the peace of the whole region has been affected by it. We cannot fail to hope that the repeated prospects for negotiations may finally succeed, and that a just solution may be reached which corresponds to the wishes of the people.

We may also think of Central America where bloody antagonisms continue seriously to trouble the peace in many countries. Proposals for re establishing peace are the object of a specific plan. The commitments that have been given are finally a source of hope. May they find among all parties a loyal adherence and an effective application that does not neglect any of the elements, including the right of populations to live under a regime that is freely chosen!

Nor may we forget all of the Near East: the populations that live in the land of Palestine, within a political and social context that is always precarious; Lebanon, where economic calamity is added to division and insecurity, at a time when it is absolutely necessary to assure its sovereignty and integrity.

We are thinking equally of internal situations of conflict which in bloody fashion are affecting so many countries like Ethiopia, Angola, Mozambique, and Sri Lanka, often to the extent of hampering aid to populations that are dying of hunger or that lack basic care. Other countries

continue to suffer in silence from an unjust situation that violates the aspirations of a majority of citizens, as in Cambodia, or even, as often happens, the aspirations of a minority.

We must always remember that civilian populations are the first to suffer from these prolonged crises, with all the human tragedy that this entails. That is why I wish, once again, to appeal to all those who can contribute to the alleviation of these conflicts, particularly through diplomacy. The Holy See remains convinced that it is possible in all these cases to arrive at a solution without the belligerents finding themselves humiliated as a result. With the peaceful support of figures from international life, may they show courage in finding those paths that lead without delay to true peace, the essential conditions of which I now wish to recall.

3. The will to put an end to the arms race, or still better, the will for effective disarmament, is obviously one of the conditions of peace.

Among international events of the past year, one must note especially the negotiation and signing by the United States and the Soviet Union of an agreement for the elimination of intermediate range nuclear weapons. This event, the importance of which I emphasized from 8 December last (cf. Angelus of 8 December 1987, *L'Osservatore Romano*, 9 December 1987), was generally welcomed with satisfaction and relief, because it represents the outcome of continued effort and at the same time opens up encouraging prospects for the consolidation of the disarmament process and for the future of peace. Thanks to their political will, the two great powers were able to create a new situation in which they agreed no longer just to limit but to destroy physically an entire class of weapons.

The stockpiling of these weapons in itself constitutes a threat to peace, as well as a provocation to the peoples that lack the essentials for survival and development. The fact that a portion of these weapons are being destroyed is praiseworthy today. It only emphasizes better the foolishness of the spiral in which we were allowing ourselves to be led, to the point of excessively diverting to this sector the wealth that should have been used to eliminate hunger in the world and to promote much needed humanitarian projects, notably in the areas of health and education, by activating the positive possibilities of science and technology.

Nuclear disengagement, which for the time being still involves only a very limited proportion of the respective arsenals, may now be pursued without the global military balance being called into question, to the point of reaching the lowest level compatible with mutual security. The detailed control measures put into place by the treaty show a realistic desire to have the guarantees necessary to ensure that the commitments entered into will be effectively respected. This mutual surveillance, freely agreed to, can help to overcome the climate of suspicion and can contribute to the long term growth in trust that is required. Only a climate of growing trust can guarantee the success of the disarmament process and open up new possibilities for the future.

4. Further progress is awaited by all, as your Dean has just mentioned. According to the protagonists, the agreement on intermediate nuclear weapons is more a point of departure than an end in itself. It was the occasion for the two signatories to affirm their determination to accelerate the negotiations taking place on ballistic nuclear weapons, which are the most menacing of all. It is important not only to mitigate but to remove definitively the threat of a nuclear catastrophe. It is certainly the wish of the entire international community that such talks succeed as soon as possible, inspired by the same principles.

It seems no less urgent to proceed to the elimination of another class of weapons that are especially cruel and unworthy of humanity, and that some belligerents have used again recently. I am referring to chemical weapons. I implore the political leaders involved to add this subject to the objectives that can be achieved without delay. An important step would thus be taken for the morality of international relations that would help improve the climate of dialogue to which the great powers and their respective allies now have to get accustomed.

Probably still more arduous will be the discussion on the subject of the reduction of conventional weapons and tactical nuclear arms, as they are called, connected with them. Here again, security ought to be ensured at the lowest level of weapons and forces compatible with reasonable requirements for defence, and on the basis of a balance between the parties facing each other.

On this last point, one can understand that political leaders move forward with prudence and realism so as not to compromise the future of their fellow citizens for lack of sufficient guarantees. But there is need to avoid at all cost a new form of escalation in conventional weapons which would be hazardous and ruinous.

5. Equally, one would hope that all countries, and especially the great powers, will perceive more and more that the fear of "assured mutual destruction", which is at the heart of the doctrine of nuclear deterrence, cannot be a reliable basis for security and peace in the long term. The Holy See, for its part, has always affirmed that deterrence based on a balance of terror cannot be considered an end in itself, but only a stage towards progressive disarmament (cf. Message to the Second Special Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations on Disarmament, 7 June 1982, No. 8, AAS 74 [1982], p. 880). It is only on the condition of remaining fundamentally transitional and oriented towards the search for another type of international relationship that this strategy can be considered. Such a strategy, applied in a context of détente and cooperation, must lead to a progressive search for a new balance at the lowest possible level of weapons, so as to arrive eventually at the elimination of the atomic weapon itself. In this matter one must move towards total disarmament. May the protagonists understand that their mutual security is always furthered by an interpenetration of interests and vital relations !

6. If the recent disarmament agreement was able to be concluded, it was also thanks to the intense international work undertaken over the years by the United Nations, notably by the

Commission on Disarmament and by the Conference for Disarmament in Geneva. This work makes it possible to appreciate all the elements that come together to secure peace among nations, as well as the long road that remains to be traveled. If the agreement in Washington constitutes a beginning for the benefit of the international community, may it also represent for that community a point of no return! A return to the arms race would without doubt be fatal for all. Nations that live under different political or social systems now understand better that they must learn to live together, find grounds for cooperation, and deepen their peaceful relations. And it is your honour, Ladies and Gentlemen in the diplomatic service, to devote your skills to preparing these relations and to maintaining them.

To achieve these relations, certain ethical values and norms of law must be respected.

7. Disarmament, then, is not all there is to peace. It is not even an end in itself. It is one of the elements in the process of seeking a more stable security, looking in the end to establish mutual relations based on fair dialogue, on more intense cooperation and on greater trust.

In this sense, peace takes root in a renewal of moral and spiritual convictions. Humanity is invited to change its attitude. It must believe that peace is possible, that it is desirable, that it is necessary. In order to survive, humanity is called to a turnabout, to conversion, even if it means detaching itself from a part of its history, its history of war, filled with violence and oppression, in which men and nations were reduced to the mercy of the stronger party in defiance of the justice and moral order willed by God.

Peace is not only the absence of conflict, but the peaceful resolution of differences among nations, and the driving force of a social and international order founded on law and justice. More specifically, it is necessary to secure the foundations of peace by basing them on the protection of the rights of man and also on the rights of peoples.

8. Indeed, justice travels the road of respect for the right of peoples and nations to self-determination. A lasting peace cannot be imposed upon peoples by the will of the strongest, but must be agreed to by all, with respect for the rights of each, particularly the weak and minorities.

There are still peoples who do not see their right to independence being recognized. There are also those who suffer under a protectorate, indeed an occupation, that undermines their right to self-government in conformity with their cultural values and their history.

Short of these extreme cases, which are unanimously condemned, one must take into account a desire that is more and more widespread and legitimate, that every nation, even the least powerful, be responsible for its own affairs, that it be the subject of its own development and not only the object of negotiations of interest to others or of condescending solicitude on the part of other nations.

In both the East and the West, the right of peoples to determine their destiny and to cooperate freely with others for the international common good cannot fail to foster peace, to the extent that each feels better respected, and thus a full partner in the dialogue among nations.

9. The same principle holds for relations between North and South. Inequality of access to economic and social progress likewise has profound causes that demand to be carefully examined. The pronounced imbalances between abundance and poverty can be the seeds of future conflict. A great many countries about sixty are today in a critical situation that is growing worse. All of humanity must recognize in conscience its responsibilities in the face of the serious problem of hunger that it has not succeeded in resolving. This is truly the emergency of emergencies!

Efforts made over decades to foster development must constantly be refocused on their original goal, that is, always to enable needy countries to take greater charge of themselves, to utilize their resources, to exchange their raw materials for a fair price, to have access to technology and to world markets, and reasonably to free themselves from debt, as your Dean has pointed out. This process makes an appeal to the responsibility of the more prosperous nations, but also to the responsibility of the leaders of the countries in question. It is incumbent upon them to manage available resources better, to forego certain expenditures for prestige purposes, to move away from oligarchic structures that perpetuate social immobility, and to promote productive initiative, while at the same time respecting the rights of individuals and of their communities.

Yes, one of the profound conditions for peace over the long term is development, understood as the transition from being less to being more, encompassing all of man, in his economic dimension certainly, but in his cultural, moral and spiritual dimensions as well. One can never say often enough that "development is the new name for peace", to use the beautiful expression of my predecessor, Paul VI. I will return to this major theme in a future encyclical to be published in commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of *Populorum Progressio*.

The two processes of disarmament and development must continue until they are joined together and support one another. It would be especially absurd if aid for development became aid for weapons in Third World countries, even if these countries need the means to defend themselves. The power politics of industrial countries must not cancel with one hand the contribution granted by the other for the authentic development of Peoples.

10. The independence and freedom of States among themselves does not suffice to establish a climate of peace in the world. Peace is also social peace, order founded on justice within sovereign States, to which it falls to guarantee by just laws the conditions for a human life worthy of the name for all their citizens. It seems to me today that what the teaching of the Church calls the "natural order" of co existence, the "order willed by God", finds its expression partly in the culture of the rights of man, if one can thus characterize a civilization founded on respect for the

transcendent value of the person. The person is in effect the foundation and the goal of the social order. The person is the subject of inalienable rights and of duties of conscience, guaranteed by the Creator, and is not first and foremost the object of "rights" granted by the State, at the whim of the public interest as determined by the State. The person must be able to fulfil himself or herself in freedom and in truth.

This year we are celebrating the fortieth anniversary of the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights". Although it is given different interpretations, the lofty principles that it contains merit universal attention. This document may be considered "a milestone on the long and difficult path of the human race" (Discourse to the United Nations, 2 October 1979, No. 7). The principles contained in the Declaration, if faithfully put into practice in the legislation of the different countries, can lead nations to authentic progress, with the understanding that this progress is identified above all with "the primacy given to spiritual values and by the progress of moral life" (cf. *ibid.*).

11. The Declaration is of such importance in our eyes that it transcends the racial, cultural and institutional differences of peoples, and affirms beyond every kind of boundary the equal dignity of all the members of the human community. It is a dignity that every constituted society, whether national or international, must respect, protect and promote.

The happiness of individuals depends on it, as does the peace of the world. The fact is that peace is indivisible. It cannot be secured on the international level if it is not rooted in social peace within nations. Every unjust situation inflicted upon a human community carries the risk of one day exploding and even assuming international dimensions that no one will any longer be able to control. "The spirit of war", as I said to the United Nations General Assembly in 1979, "in its basic, primordial meaning springs up and grows to maturity where the inalienable rights of man are violated" (*ibid.*, No. 11).

These human rights are individual rights as well as social rights, such as those that assure an active participation in public life. In today's context of violence, I consider it my duty to recall the right of absolute respect for human life, in all its stages and whatever the state of health, from conception until its last moments. I equally condemn all forms of terrorism which attack the life of innocent people, and also State terrorism which stifles fundamental liberties.

I am especially mindful of freedom of conscience. As you know, I devoted my most recent Message for the World Day of Peace to this major theme. The right to religious freedom, that is, the power to comply with the dictates of one's conscience in the search for truth and to profess publicly one's faith by freely belonging to an organized religious community, is, as it were, the *raison d'être* for the other fundamental freedoms of man. To the extent that the profession of a conviction touches the conscience most intimately, it cannot fail to influence the choices and commitments of man. This being so, believers are led to contribute effectively to public morality, to solidarity among individuals, and to peace among peoples. That is why the Catholic Church has

not ceased to exercise vigilance in order to ensure that everything is done to put an end to persecution and to discrimination against believers and their communities. In doing this, she is conscious of serving humanity by defending the dignity of the person.

12. In the final analysis, peace is inseparable from justice, from freedom, rightly understood, and from truth. It presumes a climate of trust. It is something more complex than disarmament alone, even though the latter is still a very important process for building a world of peace and as a test of the will for peace.

In this context, I would like to express here my best wishes for a successful conclusion to the meeting of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, now taking place in Vienna. The final document now in preparation should represent a notable contribution in securing and furthering together the military and humanitarian aspects of peace.

For her part, the Church recognizes her responsibility in building peace. Not only does she recall the principles drawn from the Gospel, but she also seeks to form people capable of being true artisans of peace in the places where they live.

Cod's plan is a plan of peace for all of humanity. Most believers know that God is the Creator, the source of life, the guarantor of justice, the defender of the oppressed, the One who ceaselessly calls men to live in fraternity, or to be reconciled, to be forgiven, to rebuild in peace that which has been destroyed and divided by thoughtless and sinful men. True believers must be in the front line of those who work for peace and who, at the same time, await it from God as a gift while seeking his will.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, as diplomats you too have a select part to play in the building of peace, in the disarming of prejudices, suspicions and rigidity, in the soothing of tensions, in the search for peaceful solutions, in the climate of trust and cooperation to be established, with the necessary prudence.

May the God of peace inspire your mission and bestow his blessing upon each of you, your families, and your countries!

**L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English* n. 4 pp. 6-8.

