



# The Holy See

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**Apostolic Journey to Cape Verde,  
Guinea Bissau, Mali and Burkina Faso  
(January 25- February 1, 1990)**

***Appeal to humanity at the Palace of the Economic Community of Western African States  
(ECOWAS) in Ouagadougou***

*(January 29, 1990)*

Mr. President,  
Your Eminences,  
Your Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Ten years ago, as my dear and esteemed Brother, Cardinal Paul Zoungrana just mentioned, I set foot for the first time on the soil of your lovely country. Great is my joy upon returning here today.

I thank the Cardinal for his words, and I express my gratitude to the Executive Secretary of the Inter-State Committee for the Fight against Drought in the Sahel for the message he has just delivered.

I respectfully greet the Representative of the Head of State who is attending this meeting, as well as all the authorities of Burkina Faso gathered with him. I also express my great esteem to all the personages representing neighboring countries, friendly nations, and international Institutions such as the Economic Commission of West Africa, which is our host in their headquarters.

Ladies and Gentlemen, you bear responsibility for guiding the progress of your people in the political, economic, social, cultural and religious fields. I pray God to give you the moral strength, prudence and discernment necessary to accomplish your noble mission at the service of peace

and justice, not only in this country, but in the entire area of the Sahel and on the African continent as a whole.

2. In 1980 I voiced a solemn appeal to the world on behalf of the Sahel, cruelly afflicted by drought and desertification. I wanted to add my voice to those of all who called for a generous and effective solidarity with the peoples suffering from thirst and famine. I wanted to make heard the cries of the innocent ones cut down by death or whose survival was threatened.

Throughout the course of the very long period of trial endured by the peoples of this region, considerable efforts had already been made to come to their aid. Also, since 1980 my appeal has been heard. It has stimulated new outpourings of solidarity. The German Catholics, in particular, made possible the creation of the John Paul II Foundation for the Sahel in 1984; it serves eight countries, and its Administrative Council is headquartered in your capital...

I thank Cardinal Zougrana and the members of the Foundation's Council for their persistent work. I also acknowledge the presence here today of Cardinal Roger Etchegaray, President of the Pontifical Council "Cor Unum", who exercises important responsibilities in the Foundation.

This organization's structure results from certain deep convictions of the Catholic Church in regard to the problems of development. North-South collaboration permits the true sharing of resources between the more prosperous and the more disadvantaged. However, the effective management of on-site activity falls to the direct representatives of the peoples concerned. Is it necessary to repeat that while help and advice can come from others, it is up to each people to assume, with foresight, their own development?

On the other hand, the priority for the use of the Foundation's still modest means is "promoting the training of persons who place themselves at the service of their country and of their brothers and sisters, without any discrimination, in a spirit of integral, unified human advancement, for the purpose of fighting desertification and its causes and for the purpose of aiding the victims of drought in the Countries of the Sahel" (Statutes, art. 3.1).

3. Ladies and Gentlemen, by your joint action, the governments of each country and the international governmental and non-governmental organizations have done much to eradicate the spectres of famine and thirst. I especially honour the efforts accomplished by the Inter-State Committee for the Fight against Drought in the Sahel (CILSS). Its directors contribute energetically to the fulfilment of great and difficult tasks; in the countries I am visiting at this time, the situation is still precarious, as it is in many regions of the African continent.

Having enough water and bread is always a real problem for the peoples of the Sahel. The harvests of hardworking farmers are jeopardized by the insufficiency or irregularity of rain, as well as by predators. There is a lack of equipment for drawing from the land its full potential, making

the best use of the water supply, and transporting produce. We are still far from being able to assure a basic education for everyone and the acquisition of the professional skills necessary to permit regular production growth, improvement of health conditions and, to put it briefly, harmonious development of the human person.

The world must know that Africa experiences profound poverty: available resources are declining, large areas of land are becoming sterile, tens of millions of human beings suffer from chronic malnutrition, and death strikes too many children. Is it possible that such destitution is not seen as a wound in the side of the whole of humanity?

4. During these days in which I am visiting several countries of the Sahel, I must reaffirm the severity of the evils which afflict so many African peoples. Once again, I must issue a solemn appeal to humanity in the name of humanity itself. In the land of Africa, millions of men, women and children are threatened with never enjoying good health, with never being able to live with dignity from their work, with never receiving the education which will develop their minds, with seeing their environment become hostile and sterile, with losing the wealth of their ancestral patrimony, all the while being deprived of the positive supports of science and technology.

In the name of justice, the Bishop of Rome, the successor of Peter, implores his brothers and sisters in humanity not to spurn the starving people of this continent, not to deny them the universal right to human dignity and a secure life.

- How would history judge a generation which had all the means to feed the population of the planet, yet, with fratricidal indifference, would refuse to do so?

What peace could people expect if they do not put into practice the duty of solidarity?

Would a world in which poverty fails to encounter life-giving love not be a desert?

5. The appeal which I am making again today is addressed to the peoples of the world, especially to those of the North, who have more human and economic resources at their disposal. Some generous actions have already been undertaken by public authorities as well as by private organizations, notably Catholic ones. However, if people want to help Africa overcome its handicaps now, an outpouring of public opinion is more necessary than ever: solidarity will reach its just measure only if each person is aware of the need for it. I repeat here what I wrote in my Encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*: "solidarity... is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good: that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all" (n. 38). Who would not want the world to be fraternal? Fraternity, if it is not to remain an empty word, carries with it obligations.

One of the first duties is to sincerely consider: should not the developed" societies question themselves about the example- they give the rest of the world, the needs they have created, and the nature and source of the luxuries which have become necessities for them?

Such an examination of conscience should convince the majority of citizens to ask their leaders not only to intensify their solidarity with impoverished people, but also to guard against straying from it: the poorest countries must not be viewed as mere clients or more or less solvent debtors. This type of attitude, whether conscious or not, has led to too many dead ends.

Real development can be encouraged only through trusting relations among partners. We share more than merchandise. People also exchange knowledge and scientific research; they respect each other's tradition and riches; and they help those who, previously had been receiving advice, to take charge themselves. That is how development can become a truly human and social undertaking.

I ask the richer nations to recognize the beautiful qualities of their African brothers and sisters their love for life, their dignity, their sense of mutual aid, their openness to the transcendent. May the peoples of the North show as much interest in the values of the African culture as those of the South pay to the contributions of the rich nations.

6. Ladies and gentlemen, in order to make progress in development the leaders of political, economic, social and cultural bodies are particularly called on to exercise responsibility, as much those in the North as in the countries of Africa themselves. All public authorities must function as an authentic service to the people in order to revive the hope of those who rely on the wisdom of their leaders. May the latter be attentive to the real need of their fellow citizens, their deep aspirations, their desire to participate fully in their own emancipation! May no one fear a frank and open dialogue with all others! Justice makes more progress when a spirit of understanding prevails and each person gives his or her best.

You know how much skill, tenacity organizational and planning ability and desire for action is needed to overcome the insufficiencies of public services and infrastructures, to assure all your compatriots a good education and basic health care, and to improve the level of employment and manage urbanization.

It is not up to me to go into detail or to outline programmes. However, in mentioning certain aspects of the services that you are in charge of, I want to emphasize that, in this, too, the duty of solidarity applies. Through these tasks of a technical nature, it is the person who must be served. In public activity, the moral quality of a people must be respected; all intolerance and every form of corruption, resentment, and even debasement are to be eliminated.

Development is the fruit of justice, peace, and solidarity. This concept, which the Church tirelessly

puts forward, shows the demands that are placed on every person throughout the world who is invested with public responsibility. I encourage you to act with good will and selflessness which evokes trust and promotes open cooperation among all.

7. Throughout the ages, as you know, the apostles of the Gospel have always wanted to be at the service of the whole person, seeking to meet spiritual aspirations and help satisfy material needs. Today, in making their contribution to the integral development of the person, Catholics replace the pioneers of other times who implanted the Church, at the same time that they cleared the land, where it was necessary.

Addressing you in this spirit, I wanted to bear witness to the love of Christ burning within us for every person, for the suffering, for the one who does not cease hoping for personal growth, for the one who must be able to count on the solidarity of his brothers and sisters.

Before the immense expectation of this continent, I humbly but boldly ask the world to heed my call. And I ask God to join together all the members of the great human family in a just peace through the power of love.

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*\*L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English n. 6 pp. 1, 8.*