

**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE JOHN PAUL II**  
**FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE WORLD DAY OF PEACE**

**1 JANUARY 1998**

**FROM THE JUSTICE OF EACH COMES PEACE FOR ALL**

1. Justice goes hand in hand with peace and is permanently and actively linked to peace. Justice and peace seek the good of one and all, and for this reason they demand order and truth. When one is threatened, both falter; when justice is offended, peace is also placed in jeopardy.

Precisely because there exists a very close connection between the justice of the individual and the peace of everyone, in the present Message for the World Day of Peace I wish to address above all the Heads of States, keeping in mind that today's world, though marked in many regions by tension, violence and conflict, is nevertheless seeking a new composition and a more balanced stability, with a view to a true and lasting peace for the whole of humanity.

Justice and peace are not abstract concepts or remote ideals. They are values which dwell, as a common patrimony, in the heart of every individual. Individuals, families, communities and nations, all are called to live in justice and to work for peace. No one can claim exemption from this responsibility.

At this moment my thoughts turn to those who, without wanting it, are caught in the midst of bitter conflicts. I also think of the marginalized, the poor, the victims of all kinds of exploitation. These are people who are experiencing in their own flesh the absence of peace and the terrible effects of injustice. Who can remain indifferent to their craving for a life rooted in justice and in genuine peace? It is everyone's responsibility to ensure that they achieve their desire: there can be no complete justice unless everyone shares in it equally.

Justice is, at one and the same time, a moral virtue and a legal concept. Sometimes it is represented as a blindfold figure; in effect though, it is the proper task of justice to be clear-sighted and vigilant in ensuring the balance between rights and duties, in fostering an equitable sharing of burdens and benefits. Justice makes whole, it does not destroy; it leads to reconciliation, not to revenge. Upon examination, at its deepest level it is rooted in love, which finds its most significant expression in mercy. Therefore justice, if separated from merciful love, becomes cold and cutting.

Justice is an active and life-giving virtue: it defends and promotes the inestimable dignity of every human person and is concerned for the common good, insofar as it is the guardian of relations between individuals and peoples. No one, in fact, ever lives in isolation. From the first moment of life, each human being exists in relationship to others, in such a way that the good of the individual and the good of society go hand in hand. Between the two there exists a delicate balance.

**Justice rests on respect for human rights**

2. The human person is by nature endowed with universal, inviolable and inalienable rights. These rights do not however exist in isolation. In this respect my venerable

predecessor Pope John XXIII taught that the person "has rights and duties, flowing directly and simultaneously from his very nature".(1) It is upon the correct anthropological foundation of these rights and duties, and upon their intrinsic correlation, that the true bulwark of peace rests.

In recent centuries, these human rights have been formulated in declarations of principles and binding legal instruments. In the history of peoples and nations in search of justice and freedom, the proclamation of these rights is remembered with rightful pride, also because it was often experienced as a turning-point after patent violations of the dignity of single individuals and whole peoples.

Fifty years ago, after a war characterized by the denial for certain peoples of the right even to exist, the General Assembly of the United Nations promulgated the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. That was a solemn act, arrived at after the sad experience of war, and motivated by the desire formally to recognize that the same rights belong to every individual and to all peoples. In that document we read the following statement, which has resisted the passage of time: "Recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world".(2) The concluding words of the document deserve no less attention: "Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein".(3) It is a tragic fact that today this provision is still being blatantly violated through oppression, conflict and corruption, or, in a more subtle way, through an attempt to reinterpret, or wilfully misinterpret, the very definitions contained in the Universal Declaration. That document must be observed integrally, in both its spirit and letter. It remains—as Pope Paul VI of venerable memory declared—one of the United Nations' principal titles to glory, "especially when we think of the importance which is attributed to it as a sure path to peace".(4)

On the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, being celebrated this year, it is fitting to recall that "the promotion and protection of human rights is a matter of priority for the international community".(5) Certain shadows however hover over the anniversary, consisting in the reservations being expressed in relation to two essential characteristics of the very idea of human rights: their universality and their indivisibility. These distinctive features must be strongly reaffirmed, in order to reject the criticisms of those who would use the argument of cultural specificity to mask violations of human rights, and the criticisms of those who weaken the concept of human dignity by denying juridical weight to social, economic and cultural rights. Universality and indivisibility are two guiding principles which at the same time demand that human rights be rooted in each culture and that their juridical profile be strengthened so as to ensure that they are fully observed.

Respect for human rights not only involves their protection in law. It must include all the other aspects which stem from the notion of human dignity, the very basis of rights. In this regard attention to education assumes great relevance. It is likewise important to attend to the promotion of human rights: a task which follows from love of the human person as such, "since love goes beyond what justice can provide".(6) In the context of promoting human rights, further efforts must be made to protect the rights of the family, which is "the natural and basic unit of society".(7)

## **Globalization with solidarity**

3. The vast geopolitical changes which have taken place since 1989 have been accompanied by veritable revolutions in the social and economic fields. The globalization of the economy and of finance is now a reality, and we are realizing more and more clearly the effects of the rapid progress related to information technologies. We are on the threshold of a new era which is the bearer of great hopes and disturbing questions. What will be the effect of the changes taking place? Will everyone be able to take advantage of a global market? Will everyone at last have a chance to enjoy peace? Will relations between States become more equitable, or will economic competition and rivalries between peoples and nations lead humanity towards a situation of even greater instability?

For a more equitable society and a more stable peace in a world on the way to globalization, it is an urgent task of the International Organizations to help promote a sense of responsibility for the common good. But to achieve this we must never lose sight of the human person, who must be at the centre of every social project. Only thus will the United Nations become a "family of nations", in accordance with its original mandate of "promoting social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom".(8) This is the path for building a world community based on "mutual trust, mutual support and sincere respect".(9) The challenge, in short, is to ensure a globalization in solidarity, a globalization without marginalization. This is a clear duty in justice, with serious moral implications in the organization of the economic, social, cultural and political life of nations.

### **The heavy burden of external debt**

4. Nations and whole regions of the world, on account of their fragile financial or economic potential, risk being excluded from an economy which is becoming globalized. Others have greater resources, but unfortunately cannot take advantage of them for various reasons: unrest, internal conflicts, a lack of adequate structures, environmental degradation, widespread corruption, criminality and other reasons as well. Globalization has to be linked with solidarity. Special aid must be forthcoming so that countries which are unable to enter the market successfully on their own strength alone can in fact overcome their present situation of disadvantage.

This is something owed to them in justice. In a true "family of nations" no one can be excluded; on the contrary, it is the weakest, the most fragile which must be supported, so that they too can develop their full potential.

My thoughts go here to one of the greatest difficulties which the poorer nations have to face today. I refer to the heavy burden of external debt, which compromises the economies of whole peoples and hinders their social and political progress. In this regard, the international financial institutions have recently initiated significant attempts to secure a coordinated reduction of this debt. I earnestly hope that progress will continue to be made in this direction by applying conditions in a flexible way, so that all eligible nations can benefit before the year 2000. The wealthier nations can do much in this respect, by supporting the implementation of such measures.

The debt question is part of a vaster problem: that of the persistence of poverty, sometimes even extreme, and the emergence of new inequalities which are accompanying the globalization process. If the aim is globalization without marginalization, we can no longer tolerate a world in which there live side by side the immensely rich and the miserably poor, the have-nots deprived even of essentials and people who thoughtlessly waste what others so desperately need. Such contrasts are an affront to the dignity of the human person. Certainly there is no lack of appropriate means for eliminating poverty,

including the promotion of consistent social and productive investments on the part of world economic bodies. This presupposes that the international community intends to act with the necessary political determination. Praiseworthy steps in that direction have already been taken, but a lasting solution requires a concerted effort by everyone, including the States concerned.

### **A culture of respect for the rule of law is urgently needed**

5. And what are we to say of the grave inequalities existing within nations? Situations of extreme poverty, wherever they are found, constitute a prime injustice. Eliminating them ought to be a priority for everyone, at the national as well as the international level.

Nor can we pass over in silence the evil of corruption which is undermining the social and political development of so many peoples. It is a growing phenomenon insidiously infiltrating many sectors of society, mocking the law and ignoring the rules of justice and of truth. Corruption is hard to combat, because it takes many different forms: when it has been suppressed in one area, it springs up in another. Courage is needed just to denounce it. To eliminate it, together with the resolute determination of the Authorities, the generous support of all citizens is needed, sustained by a firm moral conscience.

A grave responsibility in this battle falls on people in public life. Theirs is the duty to work tirelessly for the equitable application of the law and for transparency in all acts of public administration. Being at the service of its citizens, the State is the steward of the people's resources, which it must administer with a view to the common good. Good government requires accurate controls and complete honesty in all economic transactions. In no way can it be permitted that resources intended for the public good are used for other interests of a private or even criminal nature.

The fraudulent use of public monies penalizes above all the poor, who are the first to be deprived of the basic services essential for personal development. And when corruption creeps into the administration of justice, it is again the poor who pay the heaviest price: delays, inefficiency, structural insufficiencies, the lack of an adequate defence. They often have no choice but to suffer the abuse of power.

### **Particularly offensive forms of injustice**

6. There are other forms of injustice which put peace at risk. Here, I wish to mention two. First, not having the possibility of fair access to credit. The poor are often obliged to remain outside the normal financial system or to place themselves in the hands of unscrupulous money-lenders who charge exorbitant rates of interest. The end result is the aggravation of an already precarious situation. For this reason it is everyone's duty to work to ensure that the poor have access to credit on equitable terms and at affordable interest rates. Actually, financial agencies offering mini-credit on terms favouring the poor already exist in various parts of the world. These are initiatives to be encouraged, for this is the path which can lead to the radical elimination of the shameful scourge of usury, by giving everyone access to the economic means needed for the dignified development of families and communities.

And what are we to say of increasing violence against women and against children of both sexes? Today this is one of the most widespread violations of human rights, and tragically it has even become a terror tactic: women taken hostage, children barbarously slaughtered. To this must be added the violence of forced prostitution and child pornography, and the exploitation of children in the workplace in conditions of veritable

slavery. Practical steps are needed to try to stop the spread of these forms of violence. In particular, appropriate legal measures are needed at both the national and international level. If, as I have often stated in previous Messages, the dignity of every person is to be recognized and respected, the difficult task of education and cultural promotion must be faced. One element, in fact, absolutely must not be lacking in the ethical and cultural patrimony of the human family as a whole and of each individual person: awareness that human beings are all equal in dignity, deserve the same respect, and have the same rights and duties.

### **Building peace in justice is a task for one and all**

7. Peace for all of us comes from the justice of each of us. No one is excused from a task of such importance for the whole of humanity. It concerns every man and every woman, each according to his or her own competence and responsibility.

I appeal above all to you, Heads of States and Leaders of Nations, the principal guardians of the rule of law in your respective countries. Certainly this is not an easy task for you to fulfil, but it constitutes a primary obligation. May the codes which govern the States you serve be a guarantee of justice for the people and an incentive for an ever growing sense of civic responsibility.

Furthermore, building peace in justice calls for the cooperation of every sector of society, each in its own area of influence and in harmony with other groups within the community. In particular I encourage you, educators engaged at every level in training and educating the younger generation: form them in moral and civic values, instil in them a lively sense of rights and duties, beginning with the experience of the school community itself. Educate in justice in order to educate in peace: this is one of your primary tasks.

In the formative process, the family is indispensable. The family is the appropriate environment for the human formation of the younger generation. From your example, dear parents, depends to a large degree the moral character of your children: they assimilate it from the kind of relations which you foster within the family nucleus and towards those outside it. The family is the first school of living, and the influence received inside the family is decisive for the future development of the individual.

Finally, to you, young people of the world, who spontaneously aspire to justice and peace, I say: always keep alive the quest for these ideals, and have the patience and persistence to pursue them whatever the concrete situation in which you find yourselves. Be quick to reject the temptation of unlawful short-cuts towards false mirages of success and wealth. On the contrary, value what is right and true, even when to do so requires sacrifice and commits you to going against the current. Thus it is that "from the justice of each comes peace for all".

### **Sharing, the way to peace**

8. The Jubilee of the Year 2000 is fast approaching, a time which for believers is devoted in a special way to God, the Lord of history, a reminder to all of the radical dependence of the creature on the Creator. But in the Biblical tradition it was also a time for freeing slaves, for returning land to its rightful owner, for forgiving debts, thus restoring the conditions of equality willed by God among all the members of the people. It is therefore a special time for seeking that justice which leads to peace.

By virtue of their faith in the God who is love and of their sharing in Christ's universal redemption, Christians are called to act justly and to live in peace with all, for "Jesus does not merely give us peace. He gives us his Peace accompanied by his Justice. He is Peace and Justice. He becomes our Peace and our Justice".(10) I said these words almost twenty years ago, but against the backdrop of the radical changes now taking place they assume an even more specific and vital meaning.

The distinctive mark of the Christian, today more than ever, must be love for the poor, the weak, the suffering. Living out this demanding commitment requires a total reversal of the alleged values which make people seek only their own good: power, pleasure, the unscrupulous accumulation of wealth. Yes, it is precisely to this radical conversion that Christ's disciples are called. Those who commit themselves to following this path will truly experience "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom 14:17), and will taste "the peaceful fruit of righteousness" (Heb 12:11).

I wish to repeat to the Christians of all continents the admonishment of the Second Vatican Council: "The demands of justice should first be satisfied, lest the giving of what is due in justice be represented as the offering of a charitable gift".(11) A society of genuine solidarity can be built only if the well-off, in helping the poor, do not stop at giving from what they do not need. Moreover, offering material things is not enough: what is needed is a spirit of sharing, so that we consider it an honour to be able to devote our care and attention to the needs of our brothers and sisters in difficulty. Christians, the followers of other religions and numberless men and women of good will today feel called to a simple life-style as a condition for making the just sharing of the fruits of God's creation a reality. Those living in poverty can wait no longer: they need help now and so have a right to receive immediately what they need.

### **The Holy Spirit at work in the world**

9. The First Sunday of Advent marked the beginning of the second year of immediate preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, dedicated to the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of hope is at work in the world. He is present in the selfless service of those who work alongside the outcast and the suffering, those who welcome immigrants and refugees, those who bravely refuse to reject a person or a whole group for ethnic, cultural or religious reasons. He is especially present in the generous activity of all who patiently and perseveringly continue to promote peace and reconciliation between people who were once opponents and enemies. Indeed, these are signs of hope which encourage us to seek the justice which leads to peace.

The heart of the Gospel message is Christ, who is everyone's peace and reconciliation. May his countenance shine upon the path of humanity as it prepares to cross the threshold of the Third Millennium!

May his justice and his peace become a gift for all, without distinction! "Then shall the wilderness be fertile land and fertile land become forest. In the wilderness justice will come to live, and integrity in the fertile land; integrity will bring peace, justice give everlasting security" (Is 32:15-17).

From the Vatican, 8 December 1997.

- (1) John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris* (11 April 1963), I, 1: AAS 55 (1963), 259.
- (2) Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Preamble.
- (3) *Ibid.*, Art. 30.
- (4) Message to the President of the 28th General Assembly of the United Nations on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (10 December 1973): AAS 65 (1973), 674.
- (5) Vienna Declaration, The World Conference on Human Rights (June 1993), Preamble I.
- (6) Second Ecumenical Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 78.
- (7) Universal Declaration of Human Rights, No. 16, § 3; cf. Charter of the Rights of the Family (22 October 1983), presented by the Holy See.
- (8) Charter of the United Nations, Preamble.
- (9) John Paul II, Address to the 50th General Assembly of the United Nations Organization (5 October 1995), 14: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 6 October 1995, p. 7.
- (10) John Paul II, Homily at Yankee Stadium, New York (2 October 1979), 1: AAS 71 (1979), 1169.
- (11) Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 8.