



The Holy See

***MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO MR JAIME DE PINIÈS, ON THE OCCASION OF THE XL ANNIVERSARY
OF THE ENTRY INTO FORCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS CHARTER***

In associating itself with the celebration of the fortieth anniversary of the coming into force of the Charter of the United Nations signed in San Francisco, the Holy See desires to reaffirm its moral support and its offer of collaboration in the noble aims that «the Peoples of the United Nations» set themselves in the aftermath of the Second World War, and to encourage them to take up, thanks to the lessons of accumulated experience and a better knowledge of the difficulties still to be overcome, the fresh challenges of international collaboration.

1. Following the footsteps of my predecessors John XXIII and Paul VI, I have already had the honour when I personally addressed, on 2 October 1979, this eminent Assembly, to recall all the esteem with which the Holy See accompanies the activities which the Charter of the United Nations of 26 June 1945 assigns to the Nations which «determined to unite their strength» in order to promote the supreme goods of peace, justice and solidarity between them.

Without being a member of your organization, for very understandable reasons, the Holy See is associated in its work and the objectives which it pursues, to the extent that these latter are in accordance with the demands of its own mission in the world. Its presence, through the intermediary of a Permanent Observer at the headquarters in New York as also in Geneva and at the specialized organisms in Rome, Paris and Vienna, attests to its interest in the work of the United Nations and emphasizes the convergence of the aims pursued, each in the sphere proper to it, by your organization with its worldwide nature on the one hand, and by the religious community with a worldwide vocation which is the Catholic Church on the other. The latter is well aware of the specific nature of its possible contribution, which is essentially that of appealing to the conscience of humanity in the face of the forces which divide individuals and nations, in order to seek tirelessly new paths to peace, understanding and cooperation between peoples and communities.

Between your organization and the Catholic Church collaboration is moreover all the more easy and fruitful by reason of the fact that they both refer to the fundamental principle, solemnly affirmed in the preamble to the «Universal Declaration of Human Rights» of 1948, and which the Holy See itself forcefully teaches, according to which «the recognition of the personal dignity and equal and inalienable rights of all the members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.»

2. The Holy See, as you know, has considered the United Nations Organization, from its beginning, as an irreplaceable institution in the present phase of the history of humanity. My predecessor Paul VI did not hesitate to see in it «the obligatory path of modern civilization and world peace», going as far as to call it «the last hope for peace and harmony» (Address to the United Nations, AAS 57 (1965), pp. 878 and 879). This constant support on the part of the Holy See was born of the Church's conviction that the nations form one solid unity and have the duty, in spite and even by reason of the repeated setbacks of the past and the present to discover and bring to ever greater perfection the institutional mechanisms, which ensure their peaceful relationships.

As far back as August 1917, Benedict XV, in his famous appeal to the belligerent, proposed general disarmament and the setting up of an international authority capable of acting as a arbiter and of imposing sanctions (cf. AAS 9(1917), pp. 417-20). In a similar context of war, Pius XII already in 1939 was calling for an international organization really able to stand up to the arbitrary actions of States (cf. Encyclical *Summi Pontificatus*, AAS 31(1939), p. 498). In his Christmas Message of the same year, he indicated the conditions whereby the worst could still be avoided and a lasting peace envisaged: one of these conditions was the creation of a new world organization, on the basis of international law (cf. AAS 32 (1940), pp. 5-15). John XXIII, in his unforgettable Encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, for his part stated that the natural moral order requires the setting up of «a public authority of universal competence» in order to promote «the recognition, respect, protection and promotion of the rights of the person» everywhere in the world (AAS 55(1963), pp-293-294). Such an authority, he said, since it cannot be imposed by force, would have to be freely set up and agreed to by the sovereign States. Its purpose is to serve the universal common good, that is to say the supreme interests of the World Community as such, the final criterion of which always remains respect for and promotion of the universal and inalienable rights of the human person. Your organization seems to bring together all the conditions for constituting in an ever more effective manner this necessary regulating authority. This is what my predecessor Paul VI and myself have had the opportunity of emphasizing before your noble Assembly (cf. AAS 57(1965), p. 880 and AAS 71(1979), p. 1160).

3. Forty years are of course a short period when it is a question of reversing the immemorial tendency of individuals and peoples to settle their conflicts by force and defend their interests by violence. It is also a short period, unfortunately, in regard to the final aim being pursued: a civilization of peace. National self-interest, ideological rigidity, self-absorption, a reluctance or even

refusal to have recourse to international bodies in cases of crisis, the temptation to manipulate these same bodies for purposes of selfish propaganda – these are dangers very difficult to avoid. But forty years of experience have shown how much the objectives which are common to the Holy See and to the United Nations must absolutely be pursued, in spite of possible setbacks and numerous disappointments. Our faith in the God of the Bible, while reminding us that the perfection of peace and justice cannot be attained on earth by human efforts alone, assures us that it is precisely permanent striving towards that ultimate goal which gives meaning and greatness to the whole human adventure.

It would be unjust to pass over in silence everything that the United Nations has achieved in the course of this first period of its existence. We must ask ourselves what the history of the world might have been like without your Organization, during the forty years since the Second World War: these times so rich and so tumultuous, full of promise yet full of questions too, times which have known the almost total end of colonialism and an unparalleled growth in the number of Nations gaining independence, times which have seen the development of so much progress in the domain of science and technology, side by side with so much dangerous tension very particularly the deep ideological division of the planet – tensions and divisions which are certainly not the fruit of the United Nations, but the United Nations have often been able to contain the most troublesome developments thereof. Dysfunctions, which are hard to avoid but are always surmountable, must not be a reason for discouragement but rather an indication of the direction of efforts and of corrections to be made.

The more the old reflexes of recourse to force remain the order of the day, the clearer it becomes that one risks going towards a total failure not only of the international cooperation that people have been patiently trying to build up during the last forty years but also of the whole of human civilization. As far back as the eve of the Second World War, Pius XII solemnly recalled that «with peace nothing is lost, but everything can be lost with war» (AAS 31(1939), p. 334). Today, the prospect of what a nuclear war would be like leaves us no choice. It obliges us, some would say it condemns us, to create a new sort of future in which the solutions of law and justice are victorious over the law of the most powerful. Forty years after the signing of the Charter of the United Nations, the stakes of peace and the human rights must be treated with a more acute sense of responsibility than before. The commitments solemnly entered into by the signatories of this Charter must be respected and carried out according to its spirit and letter.

4. In a particular way, I am pleased to recall, in this context, the vast amount of work done by your organization over the last forty years, devising juridical instruments which make explicit and develop the protection of the fundamental rights of the human person. In this domain, which is that of the creation of a veritable jurisprudence of the universal rights of man and of international justice, important progress has been made. In this long and patient work of alerting universal consciousness and of progressively building up a more just world order, the Holy See and the Catholic Church, as you are well aware, have not failed to offer their own contribution.

Your organization is not a world government; it has no true sovereignty of its own. It is meant to be an association of sovereign States. Though it has no power of constraint, it nevertheless possesses an authority based upon the highest moral values of humanity and upon the law. The events of the last forty years seem to confirm the need that such an authority should be endowed with juridical and political means enabling it to promote ever more effectively the universal common good and to bring about the triumph of the solutions of law and justice when conflicts threaten to break out between Nations. The Holy See cannot encourage the United Nations too strongly to intensify this role of the service of peace which is their *raison d'être*, and to seek, in common accord, appropriate means of dissuasion and intervention when member States are tempted to have recourse, or unfortunately actually do have recourse, to the force of arms in order to settle their conflicts. By its nature and vocation your organization is the world forum where problems have to be examined in the light of truth and justice, with a renunciation of narrow egoism and threats of recourse to force.

5. There is one current international problem in which the Holy See shares the concern of the members of your organization, for it also presents an ethical and humanitarian aspect: this is the question of the external debt of the Third World, and in particular of Latin America.

There exists today a consensus on the fact that the problem of the Third World's global indebtedness and of the new relationships of dependence which it creates cannot be posed solely in economic and monetary terms. It has become more widely a problem of political cooperation and economic ethics.

The economic, social and human cost of this situation is often such as to bring whole countries to the brink of breakdown. Moreover, neither the creditor countries nor the debtor countries have anything to gain from the development of situations of despair that would be uncontrollable. Justice and the interests of all demand that, at the world level, the situation should be envisaged in all its aspects and dimensions, not just the economic and monetary aspects and dimensions but the social, political and human ones too.

Your organization certainly has a front-line part to play in the coordination and animation of the international effort which the situation calls for, in a well-understood spirit of equity which is also in harmony with a realistic appreciation of things.

6. In conclusion, I would stress that the Holy See shares with your organization the feeling that the priority objectives of common action must be: - in the immediate situation, an intensification of the process of general, balanced and controlled disarmament - a strengthening of the moral and juridical authority of the United Nations for the safeguarding of peace and international cooperation in favour of the development of all the peoples; - the carrying out of the agreements signed and the defence of the fundamental rights of the human person; - the effective recognition by all member States of the principles of law and of the accepted rules contained in the 1945 Charter,

the 1948 «Universal Declaration of Human Rights» and the other international juridical instruments.

The International Community cannot tolerate that States that are members of this organization should systematically and openly violate fundamental human rights, by practicing racial discrimination, torture, political and ideological repression, stifling of the freedoms of opinion and conscience. This goes not only for the interests of individuals and peoples but also for the cause of peace in the different parts of the world.

In order to achieve these objectives, it is essential that there should be established a greater confidence between the Nations of the different social and political systems, and in the first place between the Great Powers which have, in this regard, a particular responsibility.

The United Nations will carry out their lofty mission all the more effectively if in the member States and among their leaders there develops a conviction that to govern people is to serve a design that is greater than they. The vision full of hope and courage of those who drew up the Charter of 1945 has not been betrayed by difficulties and obstacles, and it cannot be, so long as all the peoples of the world are determined to overcome them together. This is the encouragement that I address to you; this is the fervent good wish that I formulate and that I entrust to the protection of God.

From the Vatican, October 14, 1985.

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