



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC CHILD BUREAU
ON THE 50th ANNIVERSARY OF ITS FOUNDATION**

To Mrs Mijo Beccaria

President of the International Catholic Child Bureau

1. This year, 1998, the *International Catholic Child Bureau* (ICCB) is celebrating the 50th anniversary of its foundation. On this occasion I am pleased to give thanks to the Lord for the growth of this international Catholic organization and for what it has done for children on all the continents.
2. I willingly encourage all those, in the *ICCB* or in partnership with it, who take up the cause of children and carry out a wide range of projects for their protection and advancement. As your association's recent report shows, in many countries, rich or poor, children are still exploited all too often, their dignity offended and their physical, psychological, intellectual, moral and spiritual growth seriously impaired. At the end of this millennium, there are many oppressive situations affecting children; criminal recourse to abortion is an attack on the life and respect due to every human being, especially the littlest ones, with whom Christ identified himself: whoever welcomes a child is welcoming the Lord (cf. Mt 18:5); handicapped children are banished from society; while very young, some children are at the mercy of unscrupulous employers and, placed too early in gainful employment, are subjected to exhausting or degrading work which prevents them from receiving the education necessary for their development. Some children are homeless and forced to live in the street, in orphanages or detention centres. Likewise, drug and pornography rings, the trafficking in human organs or situations of conflict lead to horrible forms of child exploitation. It is urgently necessary to continue actively, as you do, to denounce these situations. In this spirit, I therefore invite the civil authorities and all the institutions with a role in protecting and educating children to continue adamantly to oppose these forms of oppression (cf. *Evangelium vitae*, n. 10).
3. In this area, your organization's mission, close to the local situation, is very much in the forefront. Monitoring international life and suggesting many initiatives, the *International Catholic Child Bureau* assists local associations for promotion and development. With its many partners, it helps repair the human and emotional fabric surrounding children which is indispensable to their integral development, taking into account their innate frailty and basic needs. In fact, in the

world of children we would like to see recognized everywhere as essential: the family with both father and mother present, an atmosphere of affection and warmth, school, games, laughter, the joyful and peaceful discovery of life, so that each child, in his family and in society, with his siblings and friends, may flourish and give the world the best of himself.

The 50th anniversary of the *ICCB* thus gives me a suitable opportunity to address all men and women of goodwill: I ask them to devote themselves to seeing that every child is protected, helped and supported as his personality is formed and he builds his personal, family and social future. In view of the Great Jubilee for which the Church is actively preparing, it is good to rediscover the theological virtue of hope, "the little daughter hope", in the expression of Charles Péguy (*Le porche du mystère de la deuxième vertue*). In fact, children are the hope of humanity; it is therefore up to adults to give them renewed trust in the future, so that they may play a leading and responsible role for the world of tomorrow.

4. To encourage and guide a child's development, it is particularly important to support the families and natural communities of young people; in this regard, I urge the directors, teachers and leaders of the *ICCB* to continue their work of prevention and of rehabilitating street children, in order to remove them from situations which lead to delinquency, to put them back in a family structure and to give them a human and moral education. The same should be done for handicapped children, who need special care and assistance if they are to have the place that is theirs by virtue of their intrinsic dignity. Projects for literacy, basic education and professional training should be continued and intensified, so that each child, after receiving the necessary instruction, may be prepared to enter social and economic life. I extend a special greeting to the women involved in these different projects. By their closeness to children they have a beneficial influence, for they establish an affective and educational relationship with them which is based on trust and gradually teaches them responsibility.

5. At the local, national and international levels, the *ICCB* is also a partner in dialogue and action with the various civil authorities and with institutions that have responsibility for children, so that youth policies can be reoriented with respect for their dignity, their culture and their human and religious development. Its participation in drafting the Convention on the Rights of the Child is a significant aspect of the work it has undertaken.

6. I would like warmly to thank all those who work in the *International Catholic Child Bureau* for youth and who thus have a very concrete part in evangelization. My gratitude is also extended to the organizations and individuals who support it with their donations. I urge them all to continue their presence with children, in order to bring them the comfort and support they need to become fully-fledged citizens who can build their future and take an active part in social life. Through those who are close to them, children thus discover the face of Christ, who is attentive to each of his little ones, for what one does to the least of these, one does to the Lord (cf. Mt 25:45).

On this 50th anniversary of the *International Catholic Child Bureau*, I impart an Apostolic Blessing to those responsible for this *international Catholic organization*, to all its members and to all their co-workers.

From the Vatican, 3 March 1998.

IOANNES PAULUS PP. II

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