



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF PAUL VI
TO THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE
ON HUMAN SETTLEMENTS****

Wednesday, 24 September 1975

We are very happy to take advantage of the opportunity offered us to indicate the importance we attribute to the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, which is to take place in Vancouver next year, and to express to you our deep satisfaction with the ardour and competence with which you are assuming responsibility for its preparation.

The problem of the human environment is one of the most urgent and serious ones that ace humanity today. In the course of the next few years, the general conditions of the human environment will change in many countries, not just in the town areas, but also in the country and in he different forms of rural life. The rapid growth of the population, its concentration, the accelerated exodus of rural populations towards the towns, the changes in economic life, the new nobility of men, the extension of a basic education and greater cultural possibilities for the whole population are, in our opinion, the main factors of this change. Man's aspiration, such a legitimate one, to a better quality of life calls for a dwelling that is not just a shelter against bad weather, but also favours man's own fulfillment in his material, cultural and spiritual needs, and contributes in his way to the growth of the most human side of man.

However different the forms may be, the dwelling, to be really human, must satisfy fundamental needs, which have not been sufficiently recognized hitherto. These needs belong to two categories: one concerns private, personal and family life; the other, social life. In the first place, it s necessary to ensure the possibility of privacy, calm and intimacy indispensable both for personal and for family life. Families must be given houses proportionate to the number of their children, which will permit a normal life and the cultural and spiritual development of all, without causing a imitation of births. Other needs are connected with the necessity of being open to others, meetings, interchange and mutual enrichment. All this implies a suitable conception of cities,

towns, villages and their layout.

It is true that the environment is not sufficient to satisfy these needs. Facilities providing collective services are also necessary, some for material needs and others that meet cultural and spiritual requirements. These collective facilities must provide the individual and the family with the services that are lacking in their homes; at the same time, they must offer the opportunity for meetings and contacts that meet the needs of private life on the plane of openness towards others and permit more personalized forms of social life. Some of these facilities deserve special mention, owing to their human and social importance, and because they are often forgotten: nurseries where working women's children are looked after during the day; sports grounds and facilities, cultural centres, centres for old people, meeting places of different kinds, especially for the young. In this context, provision should also be made for places of worship, since man has spiritual and religious needs that are not fully satisfied except in concrete community expressions.

However desirable it may be to offer man a dwelling that meets his legitimate aspirations as far as possible, it is clear, however, that, as regards the human environment, absolute priority must be given to ensuring everyone the minimum conditions for a decent life. We are aware that, at present, this need is not satisfied in most cases and that the realization of adequate living conditions continues to be one of the most serious social problems. We are thinking of the large number of human beings who still have no homes, or who have only wretched hovels, lacking the most elementary comforts, such as we see springing up in the outskirts of the large cities. We are thinking especially of the large number of families, young people, old people, migrant workers living conditions unworthy of man. These situations are all the more deplorable when, as often happens, luxurious residential areas are found not far from these wretched shanty-towns. Nor should it be overlooked that these deplorable situations are made worse by those who speculate in the field of real estate in order to make excessive profits.

To put an end to this state of affairs is one of the most imperious and urgent demands of justice, since the right to a dwelling is one of man's fundamental rights.

We are happy, Mr. Secretary, to note on the agenda of the Conference concern for an environment that will fully meet all man's needs. Count on our full support in order that this United Nations Conference on Human Settlements may contribute to prepare all the inhabitants of the earth a suitable and really human habitat.

*ORa n.41 p.2, 3; *Paths to Peace* p.420-421.