



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE PAUL VI  
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE 4th INTERNATIONAL COLLOQUY  
ON THE EUROPEAN CONVENTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS\***

*Friday, 7 November 1975*

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Receiving you this morning, on the occasion of the Fourth International Colloquy on the European Convention of Human Rights, we are very happy ourselves to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the signature of this Convention. We think that the city of Rome, which witnessed it, is also particularly appreciative of it. This Act, in fact, remains a credit to the member countries of the Council of Europe which signed it, and then ratified it. It has opened the way to a better defence of human rights in this whole region of Europe. Finally, it is in our eyes a symbol and a hope for all men enamoured of justice!

To promote peace and carry on a work of moral reconstruction in this post-war Europe with its wounds still open, it was important to put in the foreground respect for human rights, to affirm them and above all to guarantee them for all citizens. It is the merit of the Council of Europe to have made provision for this without delay, by drawing up this European Convention. The United Nations, it is true, had just adopted and proposed to all peoples the «Universal Declaration on human rights». This charter was already a kind of moral commitment of enormous importance. But the European Convention wished to hasten its application for this region, in a realistic and effective way: the principles were reaffirmed with more precision and details, and above all, a suitable mechanism was set up in order to safeguard them by providing the possibility for States and for individuals, to appeal against any violation thereof.

It was the first time, it seems to us, that it was possible for persons to have recourse to an international organism, which gives guarantees of a judicial nature for the defence of their essential rights. Apart from such guarantees – as we see, unfortunately, every day – the noblest

declarations, of which humanity could be proud, run the risk of remaining without effect; and the voice of the victims of the violation of rights, even if it sometimes has an echo in international public opinion, can be flouted with impunity in their own country. We are far from having found adequate remedies, respecting at once the sovereignty of States and these fundamental rights. It would be desirable, for example, that all the rights so solemnly proclaimed should be accompanied by some juridical force, in the line of the international Pacts with regard to human rights that have already been drawn up.

In this very framework of the European Convention, three organs at the intergovernmental level are envisaged to watch over these rights in an independent, impartial way, according to a judicious and complex system of operation: the European Commission for human rights, the European Court of human rights, and the Committee of the Ministers of the Council of Europe. They cannot proceed, of course, without the full consent of the contracting Parties, and we know that the way to a unanimous and complete ratification of the Convention and the additional protocols, is not without difficulties. Great progress has been made, however. Your intention is not, in any case, to take the place of the normal possible channels of appeal in each country, but to constitute a supplementary authority when the latter are exhausted.

You are now drawing up the balance-sheet of these twenty-five years of European protection of human rights. Among the many applications presented, the number of those you can accept is necessarily small, but the fact that the way is open is, in our eyes, an important step, in the direction of greater justice, not just to re-establish it in case of violation, but also to stimulate its pursuit. Has not the prospect of such a procedure already encouraged certain countries to revise their own legislation?

What prevents the law from remaining static, is the organ set up in the service of the European Convention: «the Committee of experts in the field of human rights». It makes possible a continual study of the provisions of the Convention, in accordance with the needs of European society, and proposes revisions or complementary legislation to the competent Authority. The Holy See, in the framework of its own sphere of competence and its spiritual purpose, is happy to follow the work of this Committee, through its Representative.

To provide guarantees of justice, to promote a more adequate juridical system, is not enough, of course, to eliminate criminal attacks on human dignity. It would be necessary to intensify the permanent education of people, which would train them not only to claim their fundamental rights and respect those of others, but also to assume, conscientiously and individually, the duties that correspond to all these human rights. This is a civic and moral task to which many persons and organisms should contribute according to their family, cultural and social responsibility, and here, too, the Church does not wish to neglect any effort to carry out her specific part.

It is in this spirit, Ladies and Gentlemen, that we express our fervent wishes for the European

Convention of human rights, for the success and progress of this juridical institution that the Council of Europe has had the wisdom and the patience to establish. You know what we feel with regard to the responsibilities of Europe. It has benefited, more than other continents, from a Christian civilization which recognizes to the utmost extent the dignity of the human person owing to the value that God the Creator and Christ the Saviour set on each of our brothers. Should not this Europe set the example today of a really human civilization, which is not based only on economic and technological potential but which makes it a point of honour to defend the rights of the human person? In this hope, we assure you of our esteem and encouragement. And in this Holy Year which aims at promoting reconciliation in justice, we implore on your work, yourselves and your families the blessings of Almighty God, in whom human rights find their ultimate foundation.

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\*ORa n.48 p.10.