



The Holy See

**LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO Mr. BENJAMIN NETANYAHU
PRIME MINISTER OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL***

*To Mr Benjamin Netanyahu
Prime Minister of the State of Israel*

In recent months I have been nurturing a hope which every day is renewed: that the word "peace" in the Middle East — and above all in the Holy Land — will once again become the principal point of reference of political activity and of the commitment of everyone, both in the region itself and in the international community. I know that much effort has been expended and that many people have offered their help, but I have seen that, unfortunately, difficulties of various kinds have so far appeared insurmountable. It must be admitted that the much hoped-for dialogue between the parties, and in particular between the Government over which you preside and the Leaders of the Palestinian People, is practically at a standstill.

This fact has prompted me to write to you, confident of the friendship which exists between the Apostolic See and the State of Israel and in the spirit of candour and cordiality which marked our meeting last February. I am writing also to President Yasser Arafat, as I wish to express to both of you my very great concern at the present time and for the short-term and long-term prospects, if this situation should continue.

You will understand, Mr Prime Minister, that this intervention of mine is not motivated by concerns of a political nature nor is it aimed at proposing practical solutions, but rather springs from my profound sense of suffering, which I believe certainly corresponds to the sadness and perhaps even the frustration of the majority of Israelis and Palestinians. The Israeli and Palestinian leaders know how many people have been waiting for peace and wait for it still, hoping for a future that will be effectively better. I join them in the desire to be able

to look ahead to new horizons where the sufferings, fears and uncertainties of the past and present will be replaced by understanding, trust and peaceful coexistence. This appeal of mine is above all a moral one. I address it confidently to all those who are committed to the search for the good of their peoples. In the name of God and of the faith in Him which unites us all, let everyone avoid increasing the levels of tension and frustration: history, above all in the Holy Land, teaches us that great hopes, if unfulfilled over a long period of time, can cause further unforeseen provocations and uncontrollable situations of violence. The Israeli and Palestinian Peoples are already shouldering a burden of suffering which is too heavy: this burden must not be increased; instead it deserves the utmost commitment to finding the paths of necessary and courageous compromises. Efforts in this regard will certainly earn you the gratitude of coming generations and of all humanity. For only a Holy Land at peace will be able to welcome in a worthy manner the thousands of pilgrims who during the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 will wish to come to pray there.

Confident that these words will not go unheeded, I cordially greet you and assure you, Mr Prime Minister, that this Apostolic See is always open to the Israeli and Palestinian Leaders, and to all who, in sincerity and good will, wish to offer their support in the quest for peace. Upon the resolve and efforts of all parties in the pursuit of the well-being of your peoples I invoke abundant divine blessings and assistance.

From the Vatican, 16 June 1997.

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