



# The Holy See

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***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN 28th WORLD CONGRESS  
OF THE INTERNATIONAL UNION OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES***

*Hall of Blessing  
Tuesday, 29 September 1987*

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

1. I willingly accepted your request for a special audience during these days in which you have come together from various parts of the world for *the World Congress of the International Union of Local Authorities*. This has been done on the initiative of the National Association of Italian Communes (ANCI), - and under the patronage and with the collaboration of the Commune of Rome. Among you there are Mayors, Town-Councilors, Regional Directors and Senior Officials.

This welcome encounter enables me to extend a cordial greeting to all of you for the gesture of sincere respect which you have desired to show me by your presence here today. I also greet all of those who share with you the honour and the responsibility of the administration of your respective cities and regions. I thank particularly your President, Mr Lars Eric Ericsson, for his thoughtful and practical words, conveyed with such kind and courteous sentiments. I am pleased to hear of your various proposals and concerns. They manifest both prudent reflection and generous commitment in the administrative service that is yours. Mr Ericsson's words enabled me to perceive the number and the extent of the problems which weigh upon those called to govern and foster the social progress of a given city. They also helped me to understand the close attention and care which these demand. For this reason I wish to assure you of my encouragement and prayerful support, in view of the gravity of your task in interpreting, protecting and serving the interests of a civic community, and also in view of the degree of dedication which the city's inhabitants expect of you. I was pleased, too, to detect in the address just delivered the lively awareness and generous spirit which guides and sustains your efforts.

2. The motto for your Congress is “The Way Ahead”. I trust that in keeping with this motto, your stay in Rome will give you new insights and real help for the future, as it provides you with a chance to study in depth the most urgent demands of social life. You will have the opportunity to exchange information and viewpoints, and to clarify and confront with keener awareness so many of the problems connected with your work. These days will help you to build friendships, promote cultural exchanges and provide assistance to one another in case of need. Certainly, these meetings will stimulate a deeper understanding and appreciation of your own local traditions. But they will also contribute to the overcoming of prejudices and misconceptions and thus open the way to better understanding and mutual esteem between one community and another.

If we genuinely desire to reach harmony in international relations, then special attention must be directed towards correct and effective relations between the local communities and institutions of our different countries. Wherever partisan and insular mentalities may have been inherited from the past, contemporary administrations must channel their energies to overcoming them and, with wisdom and serenity, aim at developing a new spirit of openness and fraternal collaboration. In this challenging and necessary endeavor, *the spiritual dimension* must not be neglected, for it contributes to the strengthening of socio-cultural progress and to the preservation of the cultural, artistic and religious values which the traditions of centuries have handed on from generation to generation. Such traditions are to be found in both the great metropolitan cities and in the small townships scattered throughout remoter districts.

You are all familiar with the celebrated pilgrimages to places and shrines linked to the memory of the Blessed Virgin, or to the memory of a Saint with heroic virtues, or to some special sign of divine benevolence. Pilgrimages such as these are a spiritual heritage which enriches people’s minds and hearts, nourishing and inspiring their way of thinking, acting and loving. The City of Rome is one such place of pilgrimage, a place made holy by the courageous witness of martyrs, especially the Apostles Peter and Paul. But at the same time my thoughts go out to many other great cities and shrines, other regional and provincial capitals throughout the world: centres of natural beauty or industrious human activity, places of spirituality and holiness. Together our cities and communities can offer one another a wealth of history and culture.

3. On the other hand, “The Way Ahead” entails an uphill struggle. It demands of you renewed resolve so that you can meet the enormous problems which you have been called to tackle. These involve the fundamental needs of the people under your administration, needs ranging from housing to employment, from education to health assistance, from traffic to ecology. Each of these themes merits fuller treatment, but time does not permit. However, I would not like the occasion to pass without making a few brief remarks on *housing*, also because the United Nations has declared 1987 the “International Year of Shelter for the Homeless”. We are all aware of the grave housing situation affecting thousands of families in most of the world’s big cities. The problem has become more and more acute in certain areas due to population growth, in others because of the exodus in recent decades from rural areas to urban centres. All of this renders the work of the

competent authorities more complex than ever. It is indeed a social reality of the utmost seriousness, one which disturbs the conscience of all those who are genuinely sensitive to the aspirations and rights of every human person. The lack of adequate housing or living conditions contributes to moral decline and the breakdown of family life. It undermines the stability of society.

I am confident that you share my special concern about this issue, and that already you are pursuing every avenue in order to provide a home for those who have none: a home which corresponds to the dignity of man and woman, made in the image of God. I offer my encouragement to you as you seek concrete ways to meet the needs of those who find themselves in this unhappy predicament. In so doing, you are responding to the recommendation of the Second Vatican Council, that attention be paid “to the needs of the family in government policies regarding housing, the education of children, working conditions, social security and taxes” (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 11).

4. In considering your obligations and programmes, and in the light of the valid contribution which this Congress will undoubtedly make to these, may you also be alert to the strength which the light of faith brings to your thoughts and deliberations. Those of you who are Christians will find special grace and wisdom in Jesus Christ and his Gospel of salvation. But I urge all of you, Christian and non-Christian alike, to take into consideration the moral and spiritual aspects of the problems which you face. On my part, I assure you that I will not fail to ask the Lord to be with you and sustain you in the fulfilment of the duties with which you have been entrusted. May the divine assistance remain always with you, your communities and your families.

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