



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

TO THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS ACCREDITED TO THE HOLY SEE*Saturday, 12 January

1991 Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, 1. The traditional exchange of good wishes at the beginning of the New Year gives me a pleasant occasion to meet you and thus to strengthen the bonds between the Pope and the Representatives of the nations which desire to maintain diplomatic or official relations with the Holy See. The words of your Dean, Ambassador Joseph Amichia, have touched me deeply. I thank you for those good wishes which were so kindly expressed, and for your friendly understanding of the Holy See's activity on behalf of international relations ever more inspired by the supreme values of good, truth and justice. 2. This year we have the joy of having among us Ambassadors from some of the countries which have recently regained freedom after a long "winter", and whose people are discovering or rediscovering the rules of democratic life and pluralism. I am particularly pleased to welcome the Ambassadors of Poland Hungary and the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic; soon I expect to receive the Representative of Romania and the representative of Bulgaria, a nation which, for the first time in its history, has chosen to establish diplomatic relations with the Holy See. With similar satisfaction I greet the Representative of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, whose Government has chosen to establish official relations with the Apostolic See. I also wish to mention the presence of the Personal Representative of the President of the United States of Mexico, and I cordially welcome the Heads of Mission and their associates who have recently been accredited. With your families, you form a veritable "community" which reflects the rich diversity of the peoples of the earth in whose midst the Church seeks to give her witness of faith, hope and charity. Ever since the first Christmas, Christ has been united to every person, for that reason the Church in turn shares His concern for each person. Therefore the Pope who presides over the communion of Churches, wants to serve all people whatever their beliefs may be, and he cannot be indifferent to their happiness or to whatever threatens them. 3. As your Dean quite rightly recalled, the world has just experienced a year which was especially rich in special events. The whole of Europe has felt the effects of the regenerating winds of freedom, a freedom which was won at the price of difficult sacrifices by peoples who today see how demanding is the ideal represented by the constitutional state. The Summit of the Heads of State or Government of the 34 countries participating in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) which was held recently in Paris, provided an eloquent image of a Europe reconciled with itself. Elections have allowed the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe to express themselves. Germany has rediscovered its territorial and political unity. Disarmament negotiations have been accelerated. In the majority of European situations there is a felt need to give "structure" to the forms of collaboration already existing. Soon we shall have before our eyes a "renewed Europe", as is witnessed to by the declaration of the participants in the Paris meeting which I just mentioned: "In Europe the era of confrontation and division is over. We declare that henceforth our relations will be based on respect and cooperation.... Today it is up to us to fulfil the hopes and expectations which our people have nurtured for decades: a steadfast commitment to democracy based on human

rights and fundamental freedoms; prosperity through economic freedom and social justice, and equal security for all" (Paris Charter). We must thank the citizens and leaders who, through their faith in mankind and their perseverance, have achieved these results, which are so much in keeping with Europe's great traditions. However, please allow me Ladies and Gentlemen, first of all to give thanks to "the Lord of History", in whom we "live, and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28) who has willed an in depth transformation of Europe which, perhaps for the first time, is not the result of war. Now that this "new day" has dawned, each country of Europe is called to bring about what political change has allowed: a resolute commitment to democracy, effective respect for human rights and basic freedoms, prosperity through economic freedom and social justice, and equal security for each nation. In Western Europe these goals have already been more or less obtained, but the citizens of this part of the continent seem to be affected by a certain lack of idealism. In the 19th century many Europeans placed their trust in reason, science and money. At the beginning of our century, an ideology sought to show that the State alone incarnated the scientific truth of history and could therefore determine the values to believe in. In recent decades people believed that by an improvement in the standard of living, industrialization and production would ultimately help to assure happiness. Today's young people are aware that "one does not live by bread alone" (Lk 4:4). They are looking for meaning: those in authority in society have the serious obligation not only to hear their voice, but also to respond to their hopes. AU too often Western societies indulge in fads and passing fashion and, in a certain sense, are becoming dehumanized. The men and women of affluent societies must face the challenges of tomorrow's world; they must lay solid foundations for their construction. May they learn again how to be silent, to meditate, to pray! This is where, you can imagine, believers, and Christians especially, have something specific to say. They should always make themselves heard better make their difference understood, in order to give to the projects of the societies they belong to that "extra spirit" which many people eagerly seek, sometimes without even being really aware of it. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe are, in their own way, subject to the same difficulties. It is not enough to reject the monopoly of one party; they must also have reasons for living and working to build something else. Elections have taken place in these countries, but perhaps sometimes the candidates' programmes have not been explicit about what actions should be given priority. In these countries whose moral and social fabric is in shreds, the family and school must once again become places for forming consciences; people must develop again a taste for work that is done well because it serves the common good. In the face of all these tasks, a duty becomes evident: European solidarity. Nothing would be worse for Europe's equilibrium - one can even say for maintaining peace on the continent - than a new duality: a Europe of the rich opposed to the Europe of the poor; modernized regions opposed to backward areas. Technological and cultural cooperation must go hand in hand with common economic projects. This means that the European countries which are accustomed to thinking and producing freely should have a certain understanding for their partners who, unfortunately, for more than a half century, have been forced to suffer the constraints of systems in which creativity and initiative were thought to be subversive. These days we are following with concern the political changes in certain countries of Central and Eastern Europe, including Albania. In all the societies there is upheaval and expectations are being forcefully expressed. I am thinking of the Baltic Countries, especially the beloved country of Lithuania. Now that the European continent is seeking to regain its stride, it is essential that the solidarity of all should help these nations to remain faithful to their traditions and heritage and that, in dialogue and negotiation, they may find new solutions which will open doors and abolish prejudices. If 1990 was the year of freedom, 1991 should be the year of solidarity! However, Europe cannot be concerned about itself alone. It must resolutely turn towards the rest of the world, especially towards poorer countries or those with more problems. The Europe of 1990 has shown that it is possible to change the shape of societies without encountering opposition; today a reconciled Europe is able to express a message of hope.⁴ My thoughts now turn to Latin America. While there is a certain unity to this vast continent, this unity hardly

conceals the deep differences existing among the large groupings that form it. Poverty remains the experience of many peoples there; its tremendous natural resources are still far from being wisely exploited and equitably distributed. Moreover, one can only deplore the ravages inflicted on certain societies by all kinds of violence and by drug trafficking, even to the point of disrupting the administration of justice. I think in particular of murders, kidnappings and the disappearance of innocent people. It is urgently necessary to find solutions to the serious social and economic problems which lead to the marginalization of a large part of the population in these countries. Everything ought to begin with the restoration or with the safeguarding of family values, for the family is the nucleus of every society worthy of the name. As you know, the Catholic Church is seriously concerned about this, and seeks to be of service to all families. I am particularly concerned with the countries of Central America, where the growth of democracy and peace is advancing at a very slow pace, despite praiseworthy efforts. The momentum of the Esquipulas Agreements, the initiative for a Central American Parliament, and the Antigua Declaration for creating a regional economic community are good examples of the cooperation among neighbouring nations which I addressed in the Encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (No. 45). There are also some attempts at dialogue between governments and guerilla forces, especially in Guatemala and El Salvador, but unfortunately, as recent sad events have confirmed, innocent people continue to be the first victims of these fratricidal conflicts. There are certainly other obstacles as well, since various oligarchies hinder the road to normalization. But the time has come for all to work together in building up nations in which those who are "least" will be heard and respected with regard to their legitimate aspirations. The good of citizens is the only reason for the existence of political life: the rights that are theirs must be respected without exception. Not far from this region, a people already severely tried has for some days been experiencing a dramatic situation. I refer to the nation of Haiti. Riots, murders, acts of revenge and violence of every kind have taken a deadly toll. Here I cannot fail to mention the destruction of the Apostolic Nunciature in Port au Prince, and particularly the treatment given to the Apostolic Nuncio, whose dignity was held in contempt, and to his Secretary, who was seriously wounded. Acts of violence such as these do not, in any event, promote the political and social stability desired by the people. The attack on the old cathedral and the offices of the Episcopal Conference are a source of consternation not only to Catholics but to all people of good will.⁵ Turning our attention to Asia, we must again this year deplore the fact that certain problems remain unresolved. I will mention some of these. Cambodia. It is true that negotiations are continuing, but with results that tend to vary. It is to be hoped that a determination to seek the good of the people, who for so many years have been burdened with cruel trials, will prevail over party interest or the desire for power. How can we not be reminded that force never finally resolves a dispute? Thus the Holy See hopes that an honourable solution can be found which will respect the needs of the Cambodian people, with the help of the international community and even possibly, as some have suggested through the direct cooperation of the United Nations Organization. The situation in Afghanistan remains unstable. A great number of people have had to abandon their homes; they are suffering and live without knowing what to morrow may bring. There too, I invite the great powers, which have traditionally taken interest in events occurring in this country, to make every effort to prevent negotiations from becoming bogged down, and above all to ensure that peaceful solutions have priority over a recourse to force. Vietnam also occupies a special place among my concerns. An official delegation of the Holy See has traveled to that country for the first time in many years in order to discuss with government authorities some problems regarding the life of the local Church and certain questions of common interest. The positive atmosphere of these exchanges is undoubtedly a sign of the will of the government both to guarantee the citizens of that noble country the religious freedom for which they yearn and to take its proper place once more on the international scene. I trust that it will not fail to find support from those throughout the world who admire the courage and the tenacity of a people striving to rebuild their country at the cost of great sacrifice. I would also like to express my good wishes for reconciliation and peace in Sri Lanka, where civil war

continues to take many victims. Ethnic and community differences must never be a factor of opposition but rather a treasure to be shared! In addition to all the political and economic difficulties which affect the peoples of these areas there is also a problem which I cannot pass over in silence: I refer to the scarcely favorable conditions often reserved to the Christian communities. Frequently the object of ostracism on the part of followers of the great traditional religions, Christians also have to endure contempt and various obstacles placed in their way by the authorities. I am thinking of certain particular Churches which are forbidden to profess their faith fully and openly and to communicate on a regular basis with the Pope and the Apostolic See, as is the case with the Catholics of continental China. I am also thinking of those members of the faithful who are exposed to discrimination in their work or in society because they do not belong to the religion of the majority, and of the difficulties encountered when recourse must be had to missionaries so as to satisfy the spiritual needs of the faithful. In these cases there are often subtle yet very real violations of basic human rights primarily the right of professing one's faith, alone or in association with others, according to the rules of one's own religious family. Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen: I would hope that you understand my concerns in this regard. As I stressed in my recent Message for the World Day of Peace, intolerance is a threat to peace. There can be no concord and cooperation among peoples when men and women are not free to think and to believe in accord with their conscience, and obviously with respect for the legal norms which safeguard the common good and social harmony in every society.⁶ The Continent of Africa must equally hold our attention. In addition to the tragic economic situations which affect practically all the peoples living there, Africa too is prey to violence: how could we forget that more than ten conflicts are presently taking place on that continent? In Ethiopia war is soaking up a great part of the nation's financial resources and forcing the exodus of a great number of refugees. Famine threatens the areas of the North, particularly Eritrea and Tigris, which are ravaged by combat and closed to humanitarian aid organizations by the fronts of liberation. News of the recent opening of the port of Massawa is to be welcomed with hope, inasmuch as this can permit urgent assistance to begin to reach peoples barely at the level of survival. After thirty years of war, the time has come to establish a truce in order to favour dialogue and enable the various components of Ethiopian society to find a modus vivendi. The Sudan has not fared better. The inhabitants there, victimized by combat, ecological crises and the collapse of the economy, seem to be hostage to a domestic conflict which has lasted all too long. The Christians of that country have shared their anguish with the Holy See. Living in fear of tomorrow, desirous of being accepted and recognized as a specific religious group, they ask that their voice be heard, that their missionaries be able to carry out their normal apostolate, so esteemed and so necessary to their communities, and that assistance and help from humanitarian Organizations reach them without hindrance. Mozambique, which has often been at the centre of our concerns, seems to have embarked upon the road to peace. The Government and the armed opposition with the assistance of friendly countries and impartial organizations, have arrived at a preliminary, partial accord. This should lead, we strongly encourage, to a definitive cease fire. It will thus be possible for this young nation to undertake the work of material and spiritual reconstruction, to give itself a constitution and institutions which allow all its citizens to feel that their convictions are respected and that they can thus look to the future with greater confidence. We must also express our pleasure in the direct talks which seem to be in progress between the conflicting parties in Angola. The involvement of countries such as the United States of America and the Soviet Union can positively influence the political development of that country, which has quite literally been torn apart by struggles which have divided families, destroyed economic structures and inflicted cruel trials upon the Catholic Church, trials which she continues to endure. Finally, the institutional renewal going on in South Africa bodes well for the very stability of this vast area of the continent. The legalization of opposition parties, the release of their leaders after so many years of confinement, the numerous meetings between government leaders and other parties represent the seeds of reconciliation and brotherhood, seeds which may still be fragile but need to be

protected and allowed to grow. It is especially necessary that episodes of violence, like those which have even recently brought death in their wake, should not cause people to lose hope after so many years of yearning for the day when their country would at last be reconciled. The Holy See is also aware that many of the countries of Africa are still marked by ethnic rivalries. I think in particular of Rwanda and Burundi, whose Bishops, in a recent joint communiqué, recalled in a timely way that ethnic differences should not be a cause of division but of enrichment, since all people are children of the same Father. Nor may we forget Somalia, whose inhabitants in these days are experiencing conflict and bloodshed. May God inspire them, so that all may strive to let reconciliation prevail over armed confrontation. No less could we neglect the beloved country of Liberia, whose people are experiencing unspeakable suffering. It is time that Liberians rediscover mutual trust and that the community of nations help them to avoid what would be a genuine disaster for a country which was once so peaceful and tolerant. Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen: I wish to call your attention to the future of the continent of Africa, so rich in human resources, yet suffering from serious shortages: a famine once more threatening to affect millions of people, unemployment, great numbers of refugees, and illnesses of which AIDS is undoubtedly the most deadly. As I stated last September on the occasion of my meeting with the Diplomatic Corps in Burundi, many African countries have the feeling that they are undervalued by nations which only help them to serve their own interests. I believe that the urgent duty of solidarity towards the most defenseless demands greater efforts at a cooperation which would be above all an "encounter" between peoples, and more than a mere exchange of goods and the search for profit, however legitimate that may be. Obviously, as I recalled during that same Apostolic Journey in Africa, all such cooperation would demand free, intelligent and responsible participation by the beneficiaries themselves, together with effective support from the regional Organizations whose job it is to coordinate the various interests involved.⁷ Finally, to complete this overview of the international scene, we must pause at a region somewhat nearer to us: the Middle East, where once there shone the Star of Peace. These lands, filled with history, the cradle of three great monotheistic religions, ought to be places where respect for the dignity of man as a creature of God, and for reconciliation and peace are self evident. Unfortunately, dialogue between spiritual families often leaves much to be desired. The Christian minority there, for example, is in some cases tolerated at most. At times, Christians are prohibited from having their own places of worship and from gathering for public celebrations. Even the symbol of the Cross is prohibited. We are referring here to flagrant violations of fundamental human rights and of international law. In a world like ours, where it is rare that the inhabitants of a country belong to the same ethnic group or to a single religion, it is absolutely essential for domestic and international peace that respect for each person's conscience be a principle without exception. The Holy See awaits the commitment of the whole international communities to ending these cases of religious discrimination, which harm all of humanity and constitute a serious obstacle to the pursuit of inter religious dialogue as well as fraternal collaboration for the sake of an authentically human and thus peaceful society. Remaining in this same region of the Middle East, what should be said of the presence of weapons and soldiers in truly terrifying proportions? In addition to those conflicts which have already for so many years plunged peoples into despair and uncertainty - I am thinking of the conflicts in the Holy Land and of Lebanon - there has also been for some months now, the so called "Gulf crisis". We find ourselves in fact confronting certain situations which demand rapid political decisions and the creation of a climate of genuine mutual trust. For decades now, the Palestinian people has been sorely tried and unjustly treated: bearing witness to this are the hundreds of thousands of refugees scattered throughout the region and in other parts of the world, as well as the plight of the inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza. Here is a people which demands to be heard, even if one must acknowledge that certain Palestinian groups have chosen to make their point by methods that are unacceptable and worthy of condemnation. On the other hand, however, we are forced to recognize that all too often a negative response has been given to proposals coming from various sources which might have enabled at least the first steps in a process of dialogue

aimed at ensuring both to the State of Israel the just conditions of its security and to the Palestinian people their own indisputable rights. Furthermore, within the Holy Land, there is the City of Jerusalem, which continues to be the occasion of conflict and discord between believers. Jerusalem, the "Holy", the "City of Peace"...Near by Lebanon has fallen to pieces. For years, it lay dying before the eyes of the world, without anyone ever helping it to overcome its domestic problems and to be freed from foreign elements and powers which wished to use it for their own ends. It is time that all non Lebanese armed forces commit themselves to evacuating Lebanese territory and that the Lebanese be in a position to choose the forms of their co existence in fidelity to their history and in continuity with their heritage of cultural and religious pluralism. The Gulf area, finally, has been in a state of siege since August; it has become quite clear to all that when one country violates the most elementary rules of international law, the entire coexistence of nations is put to the test. One cannot allow the law of the stronger to be brutally imposed upon the weaker. One of the great advances in the development of international law has been precisely to establish that all countries are equal in their dignity and that all have equal rights. It is fortunate indeed that the United Nations Organization has been the international instance which quickly took over the management of this grave crisis. Nor should this be surprising, if we recall that the Preamble and the first article of the Charter of San Francisco assign it as a priority the will to "preserve future generations from the scourge of war" and to "check every act of aggression". This is why, faithful to this heritage and conscious of the risks - I would say even of the perilous venture - which a war in the Gulf would represent, true friends of peace know that now more than ever is the time for dialogue, for negotiation, and for affirming the primacy of international law. Yes, peace is still possible; war would be a decline for all humanity. Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen: I wish you to know my deep concern about the situation which has been created in this area of the Middle East. I have expressed this concern on a number of occasions, and most recently yesterday, in addressing a telegramme to the Secretary General of the United Nations. On the one hand, we have before us the armed invasion of a country and a brutal violation of international law as defined by the U.N. and by moral law. These are unacceptable facts. On the other hand while the massive concentration of men and arms which has followed it has been aimed at putting an end to what must be clearly defined as aggression, there is no doubt that, should it end even in limited military action, the operations would be particularly costly in human life, to say nothing of the ecological, political, economic and strategic consequences, whose full gravity and import we have perhaps not yet completely assessed. Finally, without entering into the profound causes of violence in this part of the world, a peace obtained by arms could only prepare new acts of violence.⁸ In fact, there is a relationship between force, law and values which international society cannot afford to neglect. States are today rediscovering, especially as a result of the various structures of international cooperation which unite them that international law does not constitute a kind of extension of their own unlimited sovereignty, or a protection of their interests alone or even of their attempts to increase their sphere of power and influence. Instead, it is truly a code of behaviour for the human family as a whole. The law of nations, the ancestor of international law, took shape over the centuries by distilling and codifying certain universal principles which are prior to and higher than the domestic law of States and which were commonly acknowledged by those taking part in international life. The Holy See is pleased to see in these principles an expression of the order willed by the Creator. We may recall, by way of example, the equal dignity of all peoples, their right to cultural existence, the juridic protection of their national and religious identity; the rejection of war as a normal means of settling conflicts, and the duty to contribute to the common good of humanity. As a result, States came to the conviction that it was necessary, for their mutual security and for the safeguarding of a climate of trust, that the community of nations be endowed with universal rules of coexistence applicable in all circumstances. These rules represent an indispensable point of reference for harmonious international activity, as well as a precious heritage to be preserved and developed. Otherwise, the law of the jungle would prevail, with consequences that can

easily be foreseen. Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen: Allow me, in this regard, to express the hope that the norms of international law will be increasingly and effectively furnished with coercive provisions adequate to ensure their application. In the domain of applying international laws the inspiring principle must be that of justice and equity. Recourse to force for a just cause would only be admissible if such recourse were proportionate to the result one wished to obtain and with due consideration for the consequences that military actions, today made more destructive by modern technology, would have for the survival of peoples and the planet itself. The "needs of mankind" (St. Petersburg 1868; The Hague 1907, Convention IV) today require that we proceed resolutely towards outlawing war completely and come to cultivate peace as a supreme good to which all programmes and all strategies must be subordinated. How can we fail to echo here the warning of the Second Vatican Council in the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*: "The capability for war does not legitimise every military and political use of it. Nor does everything automatically become permissible between hostile parties once war has regrettably commenced" (No. 79). International law is the privileged means for building a more human and peaceful world. It enables the weak to be protected against the despotism of the strong. The progress of human civilization is often measured by the progress of law which makes possible the free association of the great powers and others in that common enterprise which is cooperation between nations.⁹ Your excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, having come to the end of our meeting, I wish to renew my best wishes for the peoples whom you represent, for the Authorities who have appointed you and for your families and colleagues. We live in an age which is not lacking in signs of progress and hope. It is also an age marked by disappointments and dangers which demand a response from all people of good will. How can one fail to mention at this point the great barrier which continues to separate rich peoples from poor ones? This widening gap and the frustration of millions of our brothers and sisters who live without hope for the future does not only constitute an imbalance but also represents a threat to peace. In the light of this reality, the entire international community owes it to itself to set about making economic and social changes, and particularly to resolve the problem of foreign debt by those countries least prepared to face the demands being placed upon them. The search for the common good must guide the efforts of all, in a spirit of solidarity. Money should not become the principal criterion of behaviour. May there be a renewed effort on the part of all to restore confidence to those people and nations who are most in need! Each of us according to his or her place the place which God's Providence has assigned to us, according to our abilities has to change the world, and to take up once again one of its most ancient challenges, the challenge of peace. Some days ago, Christians awaited and celebrated a light. It shone forth from a stable where a tiny infant lay, the Light of the world! In the presence of this God given as a gift to mankind, in the presence of this god who appears so vulnerable, we must lay down our arms. He invites us to place ourselves at the service of others and to rediscover that a man is never so great as when he allows the other be it an individual or a people to grow and develop. May you, who in a special way have a part to play in the present moment of history, open the door of

hope!

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