



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II FOR THE 90th WORLD DAY OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES 2004

"Migration with a view to peace"

1. This year the World Day of Migrants and Refugees, with the theme *"Migration with a view to peace"*, provides an opportunity to think about a topic that is more important than ever. Indeed, the theme, by contrast, draws public attention to forced human displacement, focusing on certain problematic aspects of great timeliness due to war and violence, terrorism and oppression, discrimination and injustice which, unfortunately, are always featured in the daily news. The mass media broadcast to homes images of suffering, violence and armed conflict. These are tragedies that sweep over countries and continents, and it is often the poorest areas that are the hardest hit. In this way tragedy is added to tragedy.

We are unfortunately becoming used to seeing dejected, displaced evacuees, the desperate flight of refugees, the arrival in the richest countries of immigrants in search of solutions to their many personal and family needs by whatever means. Thus, the question arises: how can we speak of peace when situations of tension are reported in so many of the earth's regions? And how can the phenomenon of migration help build peace among peoples?

2. No one can deny that the aspiration to peace is rooted in the heart of a large part of humanity. That is exactly the ardent desire that spurs people to seek every possible path to a better future for one and all. We are ever more convinced that we must fight the evil of war at its roots, for peace is not only the absence of conflict; it is also a long-term dynamic and participatory process that involves every social class, from families to schools and the various institutions and national and international bodies. We can and must build a culture of peace together that will prevent recourse to arms and all forms of violence. To this end, gestures and efforts for forgiveness and reconciliation must be encouraged; it is essential to overcome disagreement and division that

would otherwise be perpetuated with no prospect of a solution. Then it is necessary to reaffirm vigorously that there can be no true peace without justice and respect for human rights. Indeed, there is a very close connection between justice and peace, as the Prophet pointed out in the Old Testament: "*Opus iustitiae pax*" (Is 32: 17).

3. As regards immigrants and refugees, building conditions of peace means in practice being seriously committed to safeguarding first of all *the right not to emigrate*, that is, the right to live in peace and dignity in one's own country. By means of a farsighted local and national administration, more equitable trade and supportive international cooperation, it is possible for every country to guarantee its own population, in addition to freedom of expression and movement, the possibility to satisfy basic needs such as food, health care, work, housing and education; the frustration of these needs forces many into a position where their only option is to emigrate.

Equally, the *right to emigrate* exists. This right, Bl. John XXIII recalls in the Encyclical *Mater et Magistra*, is based on the universal destination of the goods of this world (cf. nn. 30 and 33). It is obviously the task of Governments to regulate the migratory flows with full respect for the dignity of the persons and for their families' needs, mindful of the requirements of the host societies. In this regard, international Agreements already exist to protect would-be emigrants, as well as those who seek refuge or political asylum in another country. There is always room to improve these agreements.

4. No one should be indifferent to the conditions of multitudes of immigrants! They are at the mercy of events, often with dramatic situations behind them. The mass media broadcast moving and sometimes horrifying images of these people. They are children, young people, adults and elderly persons with emaciated faces and sad, lonely eyes. The camps that take them in often impose on them serious restrictions. Yet it is only right, in this regard, to recognize the praiseworthy endeavours of numerous public and private organizations to alleviate the disturbing situations that have come into existence in many parts of the world.

Nor is it possible not to denounce the trafficking practised by unscrupulous exploiters who abandon at sea, on precarious crafts, people desperately seeking a more certain future. Anyone in critical conditions needs prompt and concrete assistance.

5. Despite the problems I have mentioned, the world of immigrants can make a valid contribution to the consolidation of peace. Migration can in fact facilitate encounter and understanding between civilizations as well as between individuals and communities. The enriching dialogue between cultures, as I wrote in my *Message for World Day of Peace 2001*, is an "obligatory path to the building of a reconciled world" (n. 3). This happens when immigrants are treated with the proper respect for the dignity of each one; when every possible means is used to promote the culture of acceptance and the culture of peace that smoothes out differences and seeks dialogue, but

without letting forms of indifferentism creep in when values are at stake. This openness in solidarity becomes a gift and condition of peace.

If the gradual integration of all immigrants is fostered with respect for their identity and, at the same time, safeguarding the cultural patrimony of the peoples who receive them, there is less of a risk that they will come together to form real "ghettos" in which they remain isolated from the social context and sometimes even end by harbouring a desire to take over the territory gradually.

When "diversities" converge and are integrated they start a "friendly coexistence of differences". Values are rediscovered that are common to every culture, which unite rather than divide and have put down roots in the same human soil. This encourages the development of a fruitful dialogue in order to prepare a path to reciprocal tolerance, realistic and respectful of the particularities of each one. Under these conditions, the phenomenon of migration helps foster the "dream" of a future of peace for all humanity.

6. "Blessed are the peacemakers"! This is what the Lord says (cf. Mt 5: 9). For Christians, the search for fraternal communion among mankind has its source and model in God, One in nature and Three in Persons. I deeply hope that every Ecclesial Community, made up of migrants and refugees and those who receive them and drawing inspiration from the sources of grace, will untiringly engage in the construction of peace. May no one let injustice, difficulties or inconvenience be a discouragement!

If the "dream" of a peaceful world is shared by all, if the refugees' and migrants' contribution is properly evaluated, then humanity can become more and more of a universal family and our earth a true "common home".

7. With his life and death on the Cross, Jesus showed us the way to take. With his Resurrection, he assured us that good will always triumph over evil and that our every effort, our every suffering, offered to the heavenly Father in communion with his passion, will contribute to bringing about the universal plan of salvation.

With this certainty, I invite all who are involved in the vast sector of migration to be peacemakers. To this end, I assure them of my special remembrance in prayer, and as I invoke the motherly intercession of Mary, Mother of the Only-Begotten Son of God made man, I send my Blessing to each and every one.

From the Vatican, 15 December 2003

JOHN PAUL II

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