



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO THE THIRD SPECIAL SESSION

OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY DEVOTED TO DISARMAMENT*

The Third Special Session of the General Assembly devoted to Disarmament, to which I have the privilege of addressing this Message, is taking place at a time when several signs in international life lead us to believe that efforts to make progress towards co-operation and peace will have a successful outcome, thanks to effective disarmament measures. At present, the International Community rightly seems to fluctuate between concern over local conflicts which are mired down, and hope, due in particular to the determination of the two major Powers of the Northern Hemisphere to reach new disarmament agreements. But disarmament would not be able to achieve its purpose if the longing for peace were not shared by all Nations, and if they did not all wish to enter into a common process aimed at reducing tension and threats of war. Indeed, peace by its very nature, demands a deepening of those ethical values which give coherence to relations among peoples as well as among States. In order for peace to become a reality, humanity must draw upon its deepest and most universal spiritual resources. The invitation of your distinguished Secretary-General to address your Assembly, which renews similar invitations to my predecessor, Paul VI, in 1978 and to me, in 1982, is an indication moreover of the importance that you attach to these aspects, an area in which it is universally recognized that the Holy See is entitled to make its voice heard. It is normal that a subject so intimately linked to the cause of peace as disarmament has always been of concern to the Holy See. The moral principles which the Church draws from the Gospel, and which have their root in the conscience of all, are valid, in its eyes, for every human community and in all circumstances. Peace is a good to which all human beings aspire, whatever their cultural roots or the social systems to which they belong. Disarmament is not an end in itself. The end is peace, and security is one of its essential elements. The evolution of international relations reveals today that disarmament is a necessary condition, if not the primary condition, for security since, by a synergetic phenomenon, it allows the other elements of stability and peace to develop. All are well aware that the type of security on which our planet has depended for the last several decades – a balance of terror based on nuclear deterrence – is a security with a far too high risk level. This awareness should encourage Nations to enter into a new phase in their relations, with all due urgency. This is precisely what you are now devoting your attention to, in order to eliminate once and for all the spectre of a nuclear war and of all armed conflict. The progressive, balanced and controlled elimination of weapons of mass destruction and the stabilization at the lowest possible level of the defensive weapon systems of countries is an objective that should garner the necessary consensus as a first step towards increased security. The second Special Session devoted to disarmament could not achieve the results desired, largely it seems because of the tensions which then prevailed in East-West relations. The improvement in these very relations which we are now witnessing cannot but have a positive effect on the efforts of the entire International Community. The signing of the Washington Treaty last December is to be hailed as an important new step, above all because the parties themselves

declared – as their present summit meeting in Moscow confirms – that it is only a beginning, not an end, on the path to effective disarmament. If the negotiations between the two Super-Powers give rise to the hope that new disarmament agreements will soon be reached, these successes should not let us forget the importance of a complementary multilateral approach to the disarmament question. On the contrary, they underscore its importance. The multilateral approach has the merit of intensifying disarmament efforts in three ways, in that it allows all Nations: – to examine all the interdependent aspects of disarmament, not only nuclear, but also chemical and conventional disarmament; – to commit themselves to assume their full responsibility for the elaboration and implementation of disarmament measures: – to reinforce consensus concerning the ethical principles to be observed and the priorities to be established for concrete international action. Although a multilateral, global dialogue is no easier to conduct than bilateral negotiations, it alone reveals the full complexity of what is at stake in disarmament. It soon becomes evident that, if the aim of the disarmament process is security and a peace, it cannot ignore the root causes which condition peace. Disarmament efforts cannot, therefore, concern only some countries or be centred on only one type of weapon. These efforts should focus on the elimination of all threats to security and peace, be they on a regional or world-wide level. A global disarmament plan must be adopted, without any restrictions, with the determination to move, at the very least from a dangerous situation of offensive over-armament to a situation of balance of defensive armaments at the lowest level compatible with common security. The first decision to be taken obviously is to halt the arms race. This imperative concerns both the producers as well as the purchasers, of arms. Of course, as long as Countries are obliged to have adequate means of self-defence in order to repel possible aggression, they will be obliged inevitably to modernize and replace their weapons. But, beyond this limit, any increase in or improvement of armaments would mortgage the very possibility of reaching the desired aim, and must therefore be avoided resolutely. But more has to be done in terms of the balanced reduction or elimination of existing arms. This is what the two Super-Powers declared that they want to do, when they indicated their intention to cut their strategic arsenals in half. It is highly desirable that the process which has now begun will be strengthened and extended to all Countries and it takes into account the threat that tactical conventional and other imbalances represent. The discussions going on in the Conference on Disarmament about the elimination of chemical weapons are making decided progress which, we firmly hope, will result in a new international convention. If there is one area where a multilateral agreement is necessary, it is in regard to this type of weapon which is unworthy of humanity. The fact that these weapons once again have been used recently points to the urgent need for further efforts to improve international verification methods which will guarantee not only that chemical weapons will no longer be produced, but also that the existing stocks will be destroyed. It is important that all States without exception adhere honestly to such a convention. For all of them, forgoing chemical weapons, as well as bacteriological weapons, and of all weapons of mass destruction, is above all a moral question. In this same context I cannot remain silent about the threat that arms transfers represent. Their negative consequences are obvious in wars which are being waged between developing Countries. If law cannot defend the weaker Countries, then it is up to the International Community to make a strong commitment, in accordance with the Charter of your Organization, to ensure that appropriate measures capable of deterring potential aggression be taken. Any international disarmament effort must find its efficacy in the fundamental principles of peaceful relations. That is why when I welcomed with satisfaction, on 1 January 1985, the reopening of disarmament negotiations between the two Super-Powers, I suggested that substance be given to a «new philosophy of international relations» which would channel action in two directions: the first is an invitation addressed to States to question their own national selfishness and their expansionist ideologies, which lead them to exalt themselves to reject what is different and to fear others; the second is assuming responsibility, in solidarity, for those basic conditions for peace: respect for human rights and development. The reduction and elimination of arms are, in fact, nothing more than the visible manifestation of another

process of deeper disarmament. I mean the disarmament of spirits and hearts, according to an expression already used by my predecessors. Nobody doubts any longer that disarmament must be accompanied by an intensification of development efforts. The International Conference on the Relationship between Disarmament and Development, held in 1987 at the headquarters of your Organization, noted, among other things, that effective disarmament could create a new climate favourable to the transfer of resources and technology to developing countries. To transfer capital and knowledge which create employment and improve the living conditions of people contributes more effectively to security than do arms sales. Disarmament for development is a question of ethical choice and concerted political will. I heartily hope that the International Community will make this choice, because disarmament for development, by reducing disparities between North and South, could at the same time lessen one of the causes of world instability which most seriously threatens peace. Consequently, what the cause of peace requires today is not more strategic or technological knowledge, but, first and foremost, more conscience and moral strength. The highest religious and philosophical traditions, to which the peoples you represent refer, contain in themselves sufficient spiritual resources to give impetus and courage to those who never tire of building and rebuilding peaceful relations among Nations. The «new philosophy of international relations» which I mentioned is not synonymous with utopia, but it finds its inspiration in the supreme realism of solidarity and hope. May God bless your endeavours to assure peace for the world. **IOANNES PAULUS PP. II**

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