



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

His Excellency, Mr. Dante Caputo President of the 43rd General Assembly of the United Nations.

1. On December 10, 1948, when it adopted and published the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the General Assembly of the United Nations had the intention of responding to the concerns of an age during which "disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind." The General Assembly wished also to affirm that one of the highest human aspirations is to see the dignity of the human person recognized, and it looked forward to the coming of a world in which all could exercise freedom of speech and freedom of belief. In this sense, the Declaration expressed a common ideal to be attained by all peoples and all nations, by undertaking progressive steps on the national and international levels.

The celebration of the 40th anniversary of the Declaration offers a fresh chance to see how well the ideals adopted by the greater part of the international Community of peoples in 1948 have been respected, and also to evaluate the concrete development of human rights and freedoms in various national legislation and, even more, in the conscience of individuals and groups.

2. I know that in the course of the intervening 40 years some important initiatives have been undertaken by the United Nations, and that considerable efforts have been provided to support the ideals of the Declaration and to establish the proper juridical instruments to set in motion its fundamental principles. Without doubt that is to the credit of the United Nations. But the end of the road has not been reached as yet, as witnessed by the numerous efforts of the "ad hoc" Committees, established to clarify further the application of the principles, to work out adequate juridical instruments and examine violations of human rights wherever they are committed.

3. In that spirit, it is indispensable that public officials act with renewed determination so that States guarantee the concrete enjoyment of human rights for their citizens. This is the only means through which the higher degree of civilization, desired by the writers of the Declaration, can be reached.

How can one not acknowledge that today, in reality, hundreds of millions of human beings still see their rights to life, liberty and security continually threatened, that the equality of all and the dignity of each is not respected, and that certain new barriers are being set up for reasons linked to race, color, sex, language, religion, political views or other convictions, and national or social origin? Furthermore what should be said about certain violations which are more subtle, but which likewise strike a blow at the rights of human persons or groups?

4. For her part, the Church has received from her founder Jesus Christ the duty to proclaim the equal dignity of all persons as children of God. She has not failed, in the course of these 40 years, to reaffirm the transcendent foundations of human rights and to encourage the dynamic activities undertaken in our day to enhance these rights. According to Church teaching, the rights of man are based upon God the Creator; He has bestowed intelligence and freedom on every person; He has willed that society's structures be placed at the service of man.

Mr. President, in the present circumstances, I am happy to renew to the United Nations my best wishes that their activities in the service of human rights be fruitful, for these rights form the basis of a just social order and are, as well, a common ideal to be striven for. I am convinced that this activity is contributing very effectively toward strengthening the world's paths toward a peace that is firmly established, and that this is the best response to the essential aspirations conveyed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

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