



# The Holy See

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## **MESSAGGE OF THE HOLY FATHER**

**TO THE GROUP "JUBILEE 2000 DEBT CAMPAIGN"***23 september 1999 Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Just one hundred days before the beginning of the year 2000, I am happy to extend warm greetings to the leaders and major supporters of the "Jubilee 2000" Debt Campaign. I am particularly grateful for your presence during these days at a series of meetings, in the context of the forthcoming Great Jubilee, on the heavy debt burdens of the poorest countries.

In the Bible, the Jubilee was a time in which the entire community was called to make efforts to restore to human relations the original harmony which God had given to his creation and which human sinfulness had damaged. It was a time to remember that the world we share is not ours, but is a gift of God's love. As human beings, we are only the stewards of God's plan. During the Jubilee, the burdens which oppressed and excluded the weakest members of society were to be removed, so that all could share the hope of a new beginning in harmony, according to God's design.

Today's world has need of a Jubilee experience. So many men, women and children are unable to realize their God-given potential. Poverty and gross inequalities remain widespread, despite enormous scientific and technological progress. All too often, the fruits of scientific progress, rather than being placed at the service of the entire human community, are distributed in such a way that unjust inequalities are actually increased or even rendered permanent.

The Catholic Church looks at the situation with great concern, not because she has any concrete technical model of development to offer, but because she has a moral vision of what the good of individuals and of the human family demands. She has consistently taught that there is a "social mortgage" on all private property, a concept which today must also be applied to "intellectual property" and to "knowledge". The law of profit alone cannot be applied to that which is essential for the fight against hunger, disease and poverty.

Debt relief is, of course, only one aspect of the vaster task of fighting poverty and of ensuring that the citizens of the poorest countries can have a fuller share at the banquet of life. Debt relief programmes must be accompanied by the introduction of sound economic policies and good governance. But, just as important if not more so, the benefits which spring from debt relief must reach the poorest, through a sustained and comprehensive framework of investment in the capacities of human persons, especially through education and health care. The human person is the most precious resource of any nation or any economy.

Debt relief is, however, urgent. It is, in many ways, a precondition for the poorest countries to make progress in their fight against poverty. This is something which is now widely recognized, and credit is due to all those who have contributed to this change in direction. We have to ask, however, why progress in resolving the debt problem is still so slow. Why so many hesitations? Why the difficulty in providing the funds needed even for the already agreed initiatives? It is the poor who pay the cost of indecision and delay.

I appeal to all those involved, especially the most powerful nations, not to let this opportunity of the Jubilee Year pass, without taking a decisive step towards definitively resolving the debt crisis. It is widely recognised that this can be done.

I pray that this Jubilee Year 2000, commemorating the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, will indeed be a moment of promise and of hope, especially for our brothers and sisters who still suffer abject poverty in our affluent world. Together we can do much, with God's help. May his blessings be upon you and your loved ones.

*From the Vatican, 23 September 1999.*