



The Holy See

***MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
OF THE UNITED NATIONS ORGANIZATION****

To His Excellency Mr Kofi Annan
Secretary-General of the United Nations Organization

The holding of a Special Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations in New York on 25-27 June to examine the various aspects of the HIV/AIDS problem is a most opportune initiative. To you and to all the delegations present I send my best wishes, in the hope that your deliberations will mark a decisive step in the struggle against the disease.

The HIV/AIDS epidemic is undoubtedly one of the major catastrophes of our time, especially in Africa. It is not only a health problem, since the disease has tragic consequences for the social, economic and political life of peoples.

I welcome the efforts presently being made at the national, regional and international level to face this challenge through the implementation of a plan of action aimed at prevention and treatment of the disease. Your announcement that a World "AIDS and Health" Fund will be set up in the near future gives hope to all. It is my sincere wish that the initial favourable reactions will quickly find practical expression in effective support.

The daunting spread of HIV/AIDS is one aspect of a social context marked by a serious crisis of values. In this area, as in others, the international community cannot ignore its moral responsibility.

On the contrary, in the fight against the epidemic, the international community should draw its inspiration from a constructive vision of human dignity and focus its attention on young people, by helping them to attain responsible emotional maturity.

The Catholic Church, through her Magisterium and her commitment to the victims of HIV/AIDS, continues to affirm the sacred value of life. Her efforts with regard to prevention and assistance to those affected, often in cooperation with the institutions of the United Nations, are in keeping with her mission of love and service to the lives of all, from conception to natural death.

Two current problems: transmission from mother to child and lack of access to medical care
I am particularly concerned about two problems, which I am sure will be treated with serious attention during the debates of the Special Session.

The transmission of HIV/AIDS from mother to child is an extremely distressing problem. While in developed countries there has been success in noticeably reducing the number of children born with the virus, thanks to suitable treatment, in developing countries, particularly in Africa, those who come into the world with the disease are very numerous and this is a cause of great suffering for families and the community.

When we add to this gloomy picture the distress of the orphans of parents who have died from AIDS, we are faced with a situation to which the international community cannot fail to respond.

The second problem is that of access of AIDS patients to medical care, and as far as possible, to anti-retroviral treatment. We know that the prices of these medicines are excessively high, sometimes even exorbitant, in relation to the resources of the citizens of the poorest countries. The problem includes various economic and legal aspects, among which are certain interpretations of the right to intellectual property.

In this regard, it seems appropriate to recall what the Second Vatican Council emphasized regarding the common destination of the world's goods, which I mentioned in my Encyclical *Centesimus Annus*: "Of its nature private property also has a social function which is based on the law of the common purpose of goods" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 7,1; cf. *Centesimus Annus*, 30). On account of this social mortgage, included in international law by the affirmation, among other things, of every individual's right to health, I ask the rich countries to respond to the needs of HIV/AIDS patients in poorer countries with all available means, so that those men and women afflicted in body and soul will be able to have access to the medicines they need to treat themselves.

I cannot end this message without thanking the scientists and researchers of the whole world for their efforts to find treatments for this terrible illness. My gratitude also goes to health-care professionals and volunteers for the love and competence which they demonstrate in the human, religious and medical assistance they give to their brothers and sisters.

Upon all engaged in the struggle against HIV/AIDS, particularly those living with the disease and

their families, as well as upon all taking part in the Special Session, I invoke the blessings of Almighty God.

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