



# The Holy See

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## **MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE FIRST CONFERENCE ON THE ANTI-PERSONNEL LANDMINE BAN TREATY\***

*To His Excellency Ambassador Wolfgang Petritsch,*

*Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations Organization in Geneva  
and President of the First Conference for the Examination of the Ottawa Convention*

*"on the prohibition of the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel landmines and on their destruction"*<sup>1</sup>. At the time when the First Conference for the examination of the Ottawa Convention "on the prohibition of the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel landmines and on their destruction" is meeting in Nairobi, I would like, Your Excellency, to offer you my cordial greetings, and through you to express my deep gratitude to all the delegations present. I am delighted with the pertinent decisions that have been taken and the actions that Governments have already enacted in order to eradicate once and for all this terrible scourge of modern times. On this happy occasion, I keenly hope that the signatory States will take pains to respect and renew their commitments clearly, redoubling their efforts to achieve the goals of the Convention. Five years after it came into force, this Convention has become a fundamental and indispensable norm for the countries that ratified it, which reinforces the strict application of international humanitarian law and remains a tangible example of solidarity between nations and peoples.<sup>2</sup> We should rejoice at the headway made through the enforcement of this norm. Real progress has been made on many sides. The Holy See, one of the first to ratify the Convention, intends to contribute actively to enforcing it through a sincere and constructive dialogue with the other signatory States. With a view to this important Assembly, it has launched a campaign to increase awareness in the local Churches of the problem of anti-personnel landmines, circulating relevant information on this serious problem, pressing for an active commitment in this regard and, in addition, asking for prayers for the victims of anti-personnel landmines and for the success of the Conference. It is imperative to pursue these efforts, especially in the areas of the destruction of munitions stocks, of mine-clearing operations and of the social and economic reintegration of victims of these weapons. Anti-personnel landmines kill and maim countless innocent victims and are a serious obstacle to the economy of the developing countries, since they deprive them of extensive areas of agricultural land that are not yet mine free and are essential for the life of these nations. This must cease! The strict enforcement of the Convention offers the family of nations the opportunity to build a renewed and pacified humanity.<sup>3</sup> It is right to inspire, between countries affected by this scourge and those that are not and between poor countries and rich countries, an increasingly fruitful bilateral and multilateral cooperation by taking the necessary political decisions as well as the financial measures they involve, which are expressions of the sincere and concrete engagement of the signatory States in the process underway. Respect for the deadlines imposed by the Convention is a further guarantee in this regard of its long-term effectiveness. When States join forces in a climate of understanding, mutual respect and cooperation to combat a culture

of death and confidently build a culture of life, the cause of peace gains ground in individual consciences and in the whole of humanity. When multilateral negotiations and international cooperation succeed in implementing practical measures that enable populations, including numerous children, to live in safety and in dignity, humanity has triumphed.<sup>4</sup> In this perspective, the special attention given to the victims of anti-personnel landmines is of capital importance, even after the destruction of stocks and mine clearance. The vigilance of the International Community must not be limited to the allocation of financial aid. It must aim to make people play the lead in their own development through actions to spread awareness of the dangers of anti-personnel landmines, to rehabilitate disabled persons, to provide psychological care, to reintegrate them in society and to teach peace, as well as through greater use of the media to broaden the conscience of international public opinion. The Catholic Church, in touch with the families of the victims and the communities in which they live, is involved in these operations in collaboration with Non-Governmental Organizations and the *International Campaign to Ban Landmines*, partners whose action and crucial role in the adoption of the Ottawa Convention and its application at the international, national and local levels I wish to acknowledge.<sup>5</sup> As I offer you my cordial good wishes for the success of this Assembly, I would like once again to launch a fervent appeal for the universalization of the Ottawa Convention, inviting the Nations that are still hesitating to adhere to it in order to take the side of peace by definitively neutralizing these lethal devices. Your Excellency, for its part the Holy See will continue to support this noble cause so that the goals of the Convention may be fully achieved. May the fruit of the reflections that will be made in this Assembly, the directives that will result from it and the decisions that will be made in it give thousands of men, women and children confident prospects of a safe, dignified future!*From the Vatican, 22 November 2004.***JOHN**

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**PAUL II**

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