



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO ZIMBABWE, BOTSWANA, LESOTHO,
SWAZILAND AND MOZAMBIQUE

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS
ACCREDITED TO THE GOVERNMENT OF ZIMBABWE**

Harare

Sunday, 11 September 1988

*Your Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,*

1. It gives me great pleasure to meet you, *distinguished Heads of Mission and Diplomatic Personnel* accredited to the Government of Zimbabwe. I thank you for the courtesy of your presence and I greet each one of the nations and peoples whom you represent.

As you know, my visits to the various countries are above all *visits of the Bishop of Rome, the head of the Catholic Church, to the Catholic communities* spread throughout the world. The Pope's task is to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to confirm the faith of the members of the Church and to serve the cause of Catholic unity.

But there is also another aspect of the mission which divine providence has entrusted to the Bishop of Rome.

2. The Holy See, whose territory is the small independent enclave in the heart of Rome called the Vatican City, is *a recognized and active participant in the international community*. The Holy See deals with the international community and with each single member in a spirit of respect and sincere concern for the well-being of peoples, with understanding for the complexity and seriousness of the problems faced by those responsible for public life. The special nature of the

Holy See's service to the human family, *corresponding to the Church's religious and moral mission*, requires that its role within the family of nations should not be of a technical or purely political kind. Rather it is a concrete and sensitive sharing in the legitimate aspirations of peoples, in their hopes and anxieties, in their practical efforts to promote peace and justice to defend human dignity and fundamental human rights.

In effect, the Holy See seeks to be a fellow traveller with the human family on its way to a more humane and truth-filled existence. It makes this journey without facile optimism, yet confident that the human family is capable of responding *to the truth of things* before that truth is transformed and subjected to the play of power or ideology. People are capable of perceiving the innate "truth of things" which the Creator has inscribed in the depths of their being, and they are capable of responding to that truth in a rational and moral way. *Herein lies the basis of hope for a better future for the world.*

3. In the service of the human family, the Holy See looks to the diplomatic community as a specially qualified partner. Each one of you is at the service of your own country's interests. But the very nature of your profession and your personal experience of other countries and cultures makes you aware of the wider picture, *the solidarity of the whole human race*, which expresses an irreversible process of interdependence making the well-being of each part depend on the well-being of the whole. In this we share a common challenge: we must be *builders of international peace, servants of the common good, promoters of understanding and dialogue everywhere.*

Today such a task is not easy. There are many points of tension. Vast sectors of humanity are oppressed by unbearable conditions of life. And while there is much collaboration and fraternal aid from one country to another and through international organizations, there is certainly room for a more general, concerted and determined *effort to alleviate the tragic situations of hunger, abject poverty, disease and illiteracy* in which hundreds of millions of persons are imprisoned. The consciences of many are rightly perturbed and there exists a growing public opinion that more must be done to resolve these problems.

4. Before you, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, who represent various countries of the North, South, East and West, and international organizations at the service of the world community, allow me *to refer to the dramatic situation of those regions of Africa affected by drought and famine.* In these areas hunger, chronic malnutrition and death dominate inexorably.

On my first pastoral visit to Africa in May 1980, I made a solemn appeal at Ouagadougou for emergency aid to the suffering people of the Sahel region. That appeal was directed to international organizations to continue and increase the remarkable work they do to bring assistance to those in need and to remedy the causes of famine; to the Heads of States to contribute generous aid; to non-governmental organizations to inspire individuals and groups to further generosity and service; to men and women of science and research to direct their work

towards combating desertification and famine (Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II "*Vehemens incitamentum ad homines aquarum penuria afflictos sublevandos, in urbe Uagaduguensi ante cathedrale templum elatum*", 7, die 10 maii 1980: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, III, 1 [1980] 1296).

Thanks must be given to all who concerned themselves with that great human tragedy. But the problem has not gone away and still today countless African lives are threatened by famine. New natural calamities have since then struck Africa, the most recent one bringing immense disaster to the Sudan. *Once again world solidarity is called for. The very survival of millions of our brothers and sisters throughout the world depends on our concern for them!*

5. I also feel obliged to call attention to another major cause of suffering for vast numbers of people in different parts of the world, and especially here in Africa: that is, *the problem of refugees and displaced persons*. For various reasons, some of them linked to injustices or natural disasters, these brothers and sisters of ours are forced to flee their homelands, to abandon all that has been familiar and dear to them, all that offered them physical and social security. And, becoming refugees, they face, often with only the help of their faith in God, an uncertain and fearful future.

As I said several years ago, after visiting the Refugee Camp at Phanat Nikhom in Thailand: "The sad lot of these courageous and unfortunate people cannot be ignored by *the international community*. Indeed the conscience of humanity must be made ever more aware of the evils of the situation, so that prompt and decisive action may be taken towards an adequate solution" (Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II "*Allocutio ad Gubernantes et Nationum Legatos*", 2, die 11 maii 1984: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, VII, 1 [1984] 1377).

6. The theme of my visit is "Human rights: the dignity of the human person". The problem of hunger and the plight of refugees are directly related to the essential question of human rights. *All human beings have a fundamental right to what is necessary to sustain life*. To ignore this right in practice is to permit a radical discrimination. It is to condemn our brothers and sisters to extinction or to a subhuman existence.

That is why the continuing state of famine in some regions, and the growing numbers of refugees in Africa and throughout the world, must weigh on the consciences of all who can and should work to remedy these situations. *Hunger in the world and the multifaceted problem of refugees are but two aspects – both very basic and important aspects – of the whole series of questions that must be faced* in order that the world find its proper balance in a new international order based on justice, solidarity and peace.

7. In these matters, *the diplomatic community has a vital role to play*. You and your colleagues can draw the attention of governments and public opinion to the needs of suffering populations and to the gravity of the underlying economic, social and political conditions which need to be addressed. Through your firsthand experience of Africa, *with sympathy and understanding*, you can seek to

persuade aid-providing agencies to design their programmes to fit the real conditions of African societies.

Likewise you can substantiate the conviction that *the countries of Africa themselves must be in charge of their own development and historic destiny*. Outside aid is urgently needed, but it will be helpful in the long term only if the essential force of growth and development is truly African.

In this sense it is only right for me to underline the special significance of the international recognition being given to Zimbabwe's achievements in the field of food production. At the same time, one can perceive a growing worldwide concern for refugees and their precarious conditions, as well as for the social and political factors which cause people to leave their homelands. These examples are sources of inspiration and hope.

8. I pray to Almighty God that conditions of peace will prevail in this Southern African region and throughout the continent so that *the peoples of Africa can effectively meet the great challenge of Africa's development*. I am sure that as committed diplomats you will do everything possible to promote the true well-being of the human family and that you will serve the cause of peace and human dignity with all the force of your intelligence and good will.

May God bless you and your families. May he protect the countries and peoples you represent.

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