



The Holy See

Apostolic Journey to Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau, Mali and Burkina Faso
(January 25- February 1, 1990)

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS***

Thursday, 1 February 1990

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. At the end of my pastoral visit to several African countries, I am happy to have the chance to speak with the members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Republic of Chad, as well as with the representatives of several international organizations. I greet each of you and thank you for your presence at this gathering.

The experience of my travels and the many contacts which I have in Rome encourage me to share with you some reflections on the issues which concern you each day. Peace is certainly your number one concern. We have the satisfaction of seeing our host country making progress in consolidating peace and working to rebuild the material ruins left by a long conflict, but also progressing in the work of profound reconciliation of people. We salute these efforts and encourage all those directing them in search of the common good.

Here on African soil, since I am seeing firsthand the admirable qualities of its peoples, I cannot help but mention also the conflicts which are afflicting them in several regions of this continent. It is a source of what seems to be endless suffering. I am thinking of Ethiopia, the Sudan, other peoples exposed to racial discrimination, and others whom endemic ethnic rivalries sometimes lead to violent conflicts .

It is true that all areas of the world have known the fires of war. Changes are occurring; positive signs are also appearing. I recently had the opportunity to express my views on these subjects.

However, since no human suffering can leave us indifferent, I want to say forcefully to the international community that solidarity among peoples has no borders; that the great changes taking place in Eastern Europe must not distract our attention from the South, and from the African continent in particular.

2. One must agree that, very often, it is not clear what causes peace to break down. It is necessary for both local authorities and the se who have influence in international relations to have the courage to be clear. What is at stake in the confrontations? Who is stirring them up? What rights are in the balance?

One should come to understand what minorities want to defend, even at the cost of their lives: their traditions, culture, and convictions, their dignity in the face of the powers which barely tolerate them and reject their legitimacy. One should also have the courage to shed light on the role being played by all parties, beginning with the more powerful ones who control the economy, military aid and alliances.

It is up to political leaders and diplomats to heed the appeals addressed to the international community. People should begin to acknowledge errors, the abuses of power, the injustices, the exploitation which they may have caused, because it is more important to serve the progress of peace for the good of entire peoples than to defend one's own prestige. There could be even further success if the first objective is always respect for the rights and dignity of every person.

The United Nations and various regional bodies have already made efforts in this direction, and we must pay tribute to that. Important texts have been adopted, such as the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. You know how much still needs to be done to narrow the gap between word and action in order to apply these texts without reservation. Will we achieve a situation in which States which respect rights are in accord in forming a community which renounces every exception to rights? Will we be able to develop negotiating procedures to resolve disputes while honouring the rights of all parties?

I should add once more that the tragic results of conflicts cannot leave the whole of humanity indifferent. The image which comes first to my mind is that of thousands of refugees who despair of finding a place of reception, of rebuilding their lives and their families. The problem surpasses the field of activity of the specialized organizations, no matter how generous their initiatives are. People are needed who can find brothers and sisters in humanity everywhere! And, beyond the specific conditions of refugees, there is the whole problem of emigration which must be faced with the respect due to so many people who have become vulnerable because of their uprooting.

3. Each person recognizes the importance of economic cooperation in order to promote peace; this is the most obvious aspect of the concrete support which developing nations are awaiting. I already raised that issue at Ouagadougou several days ago. In your presence, I would like to pay

tribute to positive efforts which have been made, such as those which brought about the recently-signed Lomé Convention and the arrangements made to alleviate the burden of debt for the poorer countries, as well as the many agreements made by the international financial institutions and those between individual countries.

You know what a long road must still be travelled to achieve a better balance; many of you are working to help make progress in beneficial cooperation. I simply want to insist once again on the human consequences of economic agreements, on the necessity of concerted efforts, on respect for the responsibilities exercised by managers and workers of less prosperous areas, as well as the attention due to the traditional values and culture of the parties involved.

International solidarity must still intensify cooperation on behalf of less prosperous nations. Worldwide public opinion now understands more the urgency of environmental protection. Is it ready to make the necessary effort? Is it also ready to take just as seriously the needs of poorer peoples in regard to health, education of the young, information and communication, development of infrastructures and services, progress in scientific research in specific areas of this continent so that the African scientific and technological institutions will be permitted free access to the knowledge and skills acquired elsewhere?

In order to illustrate my proposal with a concrete example, please allow me to mention the agreement signed last year by Cameroon and the Holy See in view of the establishment of a university, the Catholic Institute of Yaoundé. This is a cultural cooperation in which several other African countries are also participating.

As I wrote in a solemn document, "solidarity helps us to see the 'other' - whether a person, people, or nation -... our neighbour, a 'helper' (cf. Gen 2:18, 20), to be made a sharer, on a par with ourselves, in the banquet of life to which all are equally invited by God" (Encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, n. 39).

4. When international cooperation for peace and especially for development are under consideration, relations between the North and South frequently come up. I would like to emphasize the great benefit which the African nations could draw from a more intense collaboration with one another, the South with the South.

The diversity of resources and locations - to cite only one example, the "landlocked" countries and those with an opening to the sea - should cause the States to organize their exchanges and relationships better. Geography itself suggests such cooperation in the great river basins, for energy production, for transportation. And when it is a question of movement of people, of the necessary investments in education and research, of the complementarity of agricultural and industrial production, understanding between people can no longer run up against borders which scarcely ever stopped their ancestors.

We must hope that the African organizations, both continental and regional, will become endlessly more involved so that they may be true instruments for promoting peace and development for the benefit of all their members. Initiating common concrete projects will aid them, besides, to draw up joint positions in the often difficult debates which they face in international situations.

For her part, the Church in Africa has developed the habit of regional and continental cooperation. As you know, all Catholics are currently invited to an in depth reflection on all aspects of the Church's mission, in order to prepare the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops which will be a broad consultation involving this whole part of the world.

5. Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to conclude this quick overview by expressing my fervent best wishes for all Africans.

I wish that peace may advance that each human being may have the chance to develop, to be educated to start a family and raise his or her children, to be employed in a useful work, to maintain the most beautiful of their traditions and the generosity which we recognize in their heritage.

May the activity of its leaders and international cooperation help Africans receive the best of that which can be given them; however, may no person be spurned, corrupted, or hurt at the depth of his or her being!

I express my great esteem for the nation which is hosting us, and for those which you represent.

I ask God to give all the peoples of Africa strength and hope.

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