



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO SENEGAL, THE GAMBIA AND GUINEA
(FEBRUARY 19 - 26, 1992)

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

Friday, 21 février 1992

I am happy to receive you today in Dakar, in a country which by tradition and its long history has a special place in this part of the African continent and whose leaders actively participate in international life.

The Holy See, you know, gladly has diplomatic relations with the countries which desire it in virtue of the specific mission of the Catholic Church, the Holy See makes its contribution to the ever growing dialogue with governments all over the world.

Having come to Africa for the eighth time, I would like to share with you some reflections inspired by Senegalese hospitality and the light which the Gospel message sheds on the human situation on this continent. It is on the urgency and scope of the solidarity of the international community that I would like to reflect with you.

2. When one takes into consideration the current situation in Africa, the most immediate concern is obviously peace. Harsh conflicts, veritable wars, are going on in many countries. You know these situations, but I cannot fail to mention here the difficult condition of neighbouring Liberia. The countries which make up the Economic Community of West Africa are trying to obtain peace. We hope that these efforts will permit a people already sorely tried to be spared new suffering, the depletion of their resources and the destruction of their economy.

The majority of the lethal conflicts which we are witness to seem to be internal to the nations. It is often difficult for other States to ensure an arbitration that fully respects the countries involved. But

should the neighbouring States, however, not accept refugees, monitor the evolution of armed groups, stop the supply of weapons or prevent their transit? This is the first form of solidarity for building peace, which is all the more lasting if it is decided upon by the majority of the parties.

Nevertheless, I would like to insist upon another aspect, doubtlessly one that is not as easy to grasp concretely, but no less important. In the face of the conflicts and the sufferings which they cause, no diplomatic or political activity will be truly effective unless it puts into effect people's desire for a solidarity which does not stop at a country's borders. The only reason for the responsibilities entrusted to leaders is to be at the service of their peoples. Acting for peace is a deeply human mission. The nobility of politics and diplomacy is founded on the motivational level: to overcome the temptation to indifference or selfishness to vanquish destructive forces, to work for true reconciliation, to build a society of solidarity.

3. Various types of tension and conflict often result from offenses against human rights. When the simple right to life is threatened, when the minimum of material means is lacking, when the legitimate aspirations for a family life, education and work are not satisfied, a society cannot live in peace. The primary goal of the organization of society is to respond to these demands. The juridical definition of rights has value only if it is based on respect for the human being the subject of rights. The dignity of peoples presupposes that their just aspirations, their traditions and their beliefs can be expressed freely.

In a society which respects the rights of each person, responsibilities are shared and social relationships allow constructive initiatives and associations. Freedom of conscience is truly granted in the freedom to express one's religion publicly. Everyone has the same opportunity and the same open future.

Ladies and gentlemen, if I mention these simple principles, it is because it seems to me they shed light on the immense democratic movement which we see spreading throughout the world at this time, and especially in Africa. Making plans and putting them into effect are incumbent upon each nation. However it is clear that the support of the international community can and must promote the progress of the constitutional State and democracy. Please allow me to mention here the efforts made in this regard in Europe, where the Conference on Security and Cooperation has recognized that these essential aims are conditioned by respect for human rights and social justice in the States called to help one another.

To give another example, I am also thinking of the seminar which the International Labour Office will hold in a few days at Dakar on the abolition of child labour. This is truly the sign that many troubling questions must be faced within the context of a determined cooperation among the living forces of all nations.

It is not futile to reflect on what democratic life implies. During a time of great change in the world, I

recently presented in a solemn document the analysis which the Church makes of this major aspect of the life of nations: "Authentic democracy is possible only in a State ruled by law, and on the basis of a correct conception of the human person. It requires that the necessary conditions be present for the advancement both of the individual through education and formation in true ideals, and of the 'subjectivity' of society through the creation of structures of participation and shared responsibility" (Centesimus annus, n. 46).

I am convinced that solidarity between nations will be all the more constructive if it is clearly inspired by such a conception of the common life applied without distinction to the whole human family.

4. Ladies and gentlemen, it is clear that we cannot merely analyse principles, as essential though they may be. The international community must face the daily problems of people. For her part, the Church does not cease affirming that the solidarity of the whole world is at the service of the total development of the human person. I have often expressed myself on this topic, but I feel it is my duty to return to it today in the presence of the representatives of many countries from all continents.

The first evidence - but is it adequately perceived by the whole world? - is that we cannot be resigned to seeing famine still threatening millions of men women and children on this planet. Malnutrition, with all its effects on health, is still widespread. Aid is being given, but not without delays and obstacles. We must act and do even more. Beyond these emergency situations, we must understand the aspirations of the peoples of Africa who want to achieve development under favourable economic and political conditions. It is necessary to help them increase production and the whole of their economic activity, to preserve their natural resources and develop their infrastructures. All this presupposes regional cooperation, which is not yet sufficient, and a good integration into world trade.

However, we are increasingly aware of the fact that it is not enough to evaluate needs and organize markets. It is not enough to reduce the debt or grant new credit. The human reality cannot be confined to statistics. I will never tire of saying that true solidarity for development presupposes a partnership between persons and communities, the support of their initiatives, the good use of their own qualities and their cultural heritage.

All in all, this partnership of itself constitutes a community which must be at work and put more than merely resources or knowledge in common. It must share a mutual respect for people and a common love for mankind.

5. During my first visit to Africa, struck by the dramatic situation I found in the Sahel, I issued an appeal for solidarity from Ouagadougou. Ten years later I returned to the same place and solemnly renewed it during a visit with many generous people involved in development. Today

once again, in your presence, I have the duty of raising my voice and appealing to the human family in the name of its poorest members.

In this age when we marvel to see distances abolished, at a time when information is instantly transmitted every where, we are sad to see that other immense distances still exist between peoples: the tragic disparity between their hopes for life and the means available for education or health care, the great differences in the enjoyment of freedom, an extremely unequal de facto recognition of human dignity! Now when everyone is coming closer together, what a burden weighs upon our brothers and sisters when they are designated as "foreigners", "refugees" or "immigrants".

The goods of the earth, the resources of mind and heart: to what use do we put them? Christ tells us: "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Lk 12:34). So many treasures have been entrusted to us: can we selfishly hold on to them? How can we ignore what are really common resources, the resources for the life of a single humanity?

It is time for the human family to be aware of its true duties: may man be at the service of man, may people use all their talents and spiritual and material resources for the causes of peace, law, and the well being of all men and women, who are truly their brothers and sisters!

Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, I entrust this appeal to you with solemnity because you represent the peoples who are called to strengthen their mutual bonds from one end of the world to the other. On mission in a country whose inhabitants are rich in personal qualities but poor in material means, you are in the front lines of the struggle for human solidarity.

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