



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION  
FOR THE REAL PROPERTY CLAIMS OF DISPLACED PERSONS  
AND REFUGEES IN BOSNIA-HERCEGOVINA\***

*Saturday, 8 June 1996*

*Professor Saulle,  
Gentlemen,*

I am pleased to welcome you, the members of the *Commission for the Real Property Claims of Displaced Persons and Refugees in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, on the occasion of your important meeting in Rome, and to have this opportunity to share with you "the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties... those who are afflicted" (Cfr. *Gaudium et Spes*, 1) as a result of the conflict which has devastated Bosnia-Herzegovina.

You are committed to alleviating and, as far as possible, to healing the wounds inflicted by the hostilities which for almost four years have forced half the population of Bosnia-Herzegovina to look for decent living conditions elsewhere. Every refugee is an uprooted person, constantly looking for the means of survival and hoping that better days will come, when it will be possible to go home or to settle in a new place in which to live and work.

When the social, cultural and even geographical bonds which for centuries had enabled different ethnic and religious groups to share important common values are tragically shattered, the rebuilding of a fraternal society must have as its absolutely indispensable basis *an inner attitude of forgiveness and reconciliation*. The victims of "ethnic cleansing" will not be able to return to their homes in Bosnia-Herzegovina unless there takes place a "purification of hearts" both in those who stayed behind and in those who hope to return.

Your Commission is called to be the instrument of this rebuilding of social harmony. I am pleased

to see that the Commission is itself *a living symbol* of this goal, made up as it is of distinguished representatives not only of the three components of Bosnian society in the form of two "entities" but also of the international community.

Upon your difficult but extremely necessary and commendable work I invoke the blessing of the Most High God, that he may watch over and guide the long process of peace-making. I earnestly appeal once more to the refugees and displaced persons not to yield to despair but to take heart in the hope of a new life, and to respond to the assistance programmes proposed by your Commission. Finally, I once again invite Governments and the International Organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, to give priority in their assistance programmes to the reuniting of families, to respect for personal freedoms and to the promotion of the fundamental values of social harmony.

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