



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO representatives of
End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism (ECPAT)
and the European Centre for
Bioethics and the Quality of Life****

Friday, 21 March 1997

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. I am pleased to offer a warm welcome to the distinguished representatives of End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism (ECPAT). With them I greet the members of the European Centre for Bioethics and the Quality of Life. I address a particular greeting to Mons. Piero Monni, the Holy See's Permanent Observer at the World Tourism Organization, and thank him for his courteous words on behalf of those present.

2. For years your association has been committed to eliminating the global scourge of child prostitution. This commitment, which brings together Christians and non-Christians, aims not only at fighting this horrible crime, but above all at defending its victims.

How can we not express esteem and respect for such a praiseworthy work? How can we fail to hope that it will be supported in a concrete, committed way by the international community and by individual governments, political leaders and social workers, by private institutions and by the whole of civil society?

No one can remain indifferent to the painful cry of millions of innocents whose dignity is trampled upon and who are robbed of their future, nor can he refuse to accept his own responsibilities.

3. On this subject, the recent Stockholm Congress organized by this association in collaboration

with the Swedish Government and other international organizations marked a milestone in solving this most serious problem. Appealing to the conscience of those responsible for humanity's future, this meeting proposed timely political, legislative and social measures to deal effectively with this very serious problem at the national and international level.

Sharing the concerns expressed, I would like to encourage ECPAT to continue the necessary denunciation of abuses, as well as to study their causes and appropriate remedies.

4. As everyone knows, child prostitution often originates in the widespread crisis affecting families. While in developing countries the family is the victim of conditions of extreme poverty and the lack of adequate social structures, in wealthy countries it is influenced by a hedonistic view of life which can reach the point of destroying the moral conscience, thereby justifying any means of obtaining pleasure.

In this context, how can we not see pornography as a constant incitement to abuse one's fellow man?

These disturbing manifestations, which corrode the dignity of the person and the future of family life, have an inevitable impact on its weakest members and on minors.

5. In the face of so much suffering your association is committed to checking the expansion of these phenomena, counting on the effective collaboration of men and women of goodwill.

I fervently wish that your appeals will be heard attentively at all levels of social life: by political leaders and sociologists, by lawyers and economists, as well as by those holding senior posts in education, health care, trade unions and local agencies.

In fact, only joint action by national and international institutions, associations and individuals will be able to put an end to this very serious social plague.

I ask the Lord to give you strength to persevere in the work you have undertaken, and as I commend each one of you, your co-workers, your families and all who are in your care to the motherly protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary, I cordially bless you all.

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