



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER  
POPE JOHN PAUL II  
TO Congress on Pastoral Care of Migrants**

*Friday, 9 October 1998*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

1. I am pleased to meet you on the occasion of the Congress on the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Refugees at which you have addressed the theme: "*Migration at the dawn of the third millennium*". I warmly welcome you all and greet you with affection. I particularly thank Archbishop Stephen Fumio Hamao for his words on behalf of you all, and to each of you I express my best wishes for generous and fruitful ecclesial service. I am confident that the analyses made, the decisions taken and the intentions formulated during the congress will effectively encourage those in the Church and in society who share a common concern for migrants and refugees.

Migration is a problem whose urgency increases with its complexity. There is a tendency almost everywhere today to close borders and to tighten controls. However, people are talking more than before about migration and in ever more alarming tones, not only because the closing of borders has led to uncontrolled waves of illegal immigrants, with all the risks and uncertainties inherent in this phenomenon, but also because the harsh living conditions which are at the root of this growing migratory pressure show signs of further deterioration.

2. In this context it seems appropriate to stress that it is a basic human right to live in one's own country. However this right becomes effective only if the factors that urge people to emigrate are constantly kept under control. These include, among others, civil conflicts, wars, the system of government, unjust distribution of economic resources, inconsistent agricultural policies, irrational industrialization and rampant corruption. If these situations are to be corrected, it is indispensable to encourage balanced economic development, the elimination of social inequalities, scrupulous respect for the human person and the smooth functioning of democratic structures. It is also

indispensable to take timely measures to correct the current economic and financial system, dominated and manipulated by industrialized nations at the expense of developing countries.

Indeed, the closing of borders is often caused not merely by a reduced or no longer existing need for an immigrant work-force, but by a productive system based on the logic of labour exploitation.

3. Until recently, the wealth of the industrialized countries was locally produced, with the contribution of numerous immigrants. With the displacement of capital and business activities, a major part of that wealth is now produced in developing countries, where cheap labour is available. In this way the industrialized countries have discovered how to benefit from a cheap labour supply without having to bear the burden of immigrants. Thus these workers run the risk of being reduced to new “serfs” bound to movable capital which, among the many situations of poverty, chooses from one time to the next those circumstances where manpower is cheapest. It is clear that such a system is unacceptable: in practice it ignores the human dimension of work.

Serious reflection is needed on the issue of hunger in the world, so that solidarity will overcome the quest for profit and those market laws which do not take into account the dignity of the human person and his inalienable rights.

We must deal firmly with the causes, by seeking international co-operation to foster political stability and eliminate underdevelopment. This challenge must be met with the awareness that it is a question of building a world in which all human beings, regardless of race, religion or nationality, can live a fully human life, free from slavery to others and from the nightmare of having to spend their life in misery.

4. Immigration is a complex question, which concerns not only individuals searching for more secure and dignified living conditions, but also the population of the host countries. In the modern world, public opinion is often the chief rule that political leaders and legislators prefer to follow. The danger is that information, filtered only according to a country’s immediate problems, will be reduced to absolutely inadequate aspects, far from expressing the tragic reality of the situation. “In the search for a solution to the problem of migration in general and illegal migrants in particular”, I wrote for [World Migration Day in 1996](#), “the attitude of the host society has an important role to play. In this perspective, it is very important that public opinion be properly informed about the true situation in the migrants’ country of origin, about the tragedies involving them and the possible risks of returning” (n. 4; *L’Osservatore Romano* English edition, 13 September 1995, p. 3).

The duty of information is therefore to help the citizen to form a true picture of the situation, to understand and respect the basic rights of others and to assume his share of responsibility in society and at the level of the international community.

5. In this context, Christians are asked to assume their responsibilities in the Church and in society

with greater clarity and determination. As citizens of an immigrant country who know the demands of their faith, believers must show that Christ's Gospel is at the service of the welfare and the freedom of all God's children. As individuals and as parishes, associations or movements, they cannot refuse to support those who are marginalized or powerless.

Immigration is a never-ending subject of debate which is brought up again and again. Christians must participate in it, by making suggestions for creating real prospects to be implemented at the political level as well. Merely denouncing racism or xenophobia is not enough.

In addition to engaging in projects for defending and promoting the immigrant's rights, the Church "must assume ever more fully the Good Samaritan's role, making herself 'neighbour' to all the rejected" (*Address to the Plenary Meeting of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People*, 26 October 1995, *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 8 November 1995, p.2).

#### 6. "Migration at the dawn of the third millennium".

The imminence of the Jubilee invites us to await the dawn of a new day for migration by calling on the "Sun of Justice", Jesus Christ, to dispel the darkness gathering on the horizon of the countries so many are forced to leave. Christians dedicated to helping and caring for migrants find in this hope a further reason for involvement. I would like to recall here what I have already urged in my Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*: "... in the spirit of the Book of Leviticus (25:8-12), Christians will have to raise their voice on behalf of all the poor of the world, proposing the Jubilee as an appropriate time to give thought, among other things, to reducing substantially, if not canceling outright, the international debt which seriously threatens the future of many nations" (n. 51). It is well known that these nations coincide precisely with those having the greatest and most relentless rate of migration today.

The commitment to justice in a world like ours, marked by intolerable inequalities, is an essential aspect of the preparation for celebrating the Jubilee. A significant gesture would certainly be one in which reconciliation, a genuine dimension of the Jubilee, is expressed in a form of amnesty for a broad group of these immigrants who suffer the tragedy of precarious and uncertainty more than others, namely, illegal immigrants.

In preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, the Church has dedicated this year in particular to the Holy Spirit. Let us ask him to instil in us the same sentiments, desires and concerns as those in Christ's heart.

May the Virgin Mary, whose human life was marked by the pain of exile and migration, comfort and help those who are living far from their homeland, and inspire in everyone feelings of solidarity and acceptance towards them.

With this vision, dear brothers and sisters, as I encourage you to persevere in your valuable work, I impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you as a sign of affection, and willingly extend it to all your loved ones.

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