



The Holy See

Message of His Holiness Paul VI

*to the President of the 28th General Assembly of the United Nations, H.E. Leopold Benites,
on the 25th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (December 10, 1973)*

Impelled by the consciousness of our mission to render immediate, living and actual to men the message of salvation which Christ proclaimed, we have not failed during our Pontificate repeatedly to offer our moral support to the United Nations' activities in favour of all the peoples of the world.

As this eminent international Assembly now prepares to commemorate the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we desire once more to express to you our great confidence and at the same time our firm approval of the continuing commitment of the United Nations Organization to promote, in an ever clearer, more authoritative and more effective manner, respect for the fundamental human rights.

As we stated on another occasion, the Declaration of Human Rights «in our view remains one of the greatest claims to fame» [Message for the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the United Nations Organization. AAS 62(1970), p.684] for your Organization, especially when one evaluates the importance which is attributed to it as a sure path to peace. In reality, peace and rights are two benefits directly related to each other as cause and effect. There can be no peace where there is no respect for, defence and promotion of human rights. While promotion of the rights of the human person leads to peace, at the same time peace contributes towards the realization of this aim.

We cannot, then, remain indifferent in the face of the urgent need to construct a human coexistence which will everywhere guarantee to the individual, to communities, and particularly to minority groups, the right to life, to personal and social dignity, to development in a safe and improved environment, and to an equitable division of nature's resources and the fruits of civilization.

«The Church, concerned above all with the rights of God», as we said last year to the Secretary General, Dr. Kurt Waldheim, «can never dissociate herself from the rights of man, created in the

image and likeness of his Creator. She feels injured when the rights of a man, whoever he may be, and wherever he may be, are ignored and violated.» (Address to the Secretary-General of the United Nations Organization, AAS 64(1972), p. 215).

For this reason the Holy See gives its full moral support to the common ideal contained in the Universal Declaration, as also to the progressive affirmation of the human rights which are expressed in it.

The human rights are based upon the recognition of the dignity of all human beings and upon their equality and brotherhood. The duty of respecting these rights is a duty which is universal. The promotion of these rights is a factor for peace and their violation is a cause of tensions and disturbances even in the international sphere.

If it is in the interest of States to cooperate in scientific, economic, technological and ecological matters, it is even more in their interest to collaborate in the safeguarding and promotion of human rights. The United Nations Charter expressly obliges them to pursue this objective.

The objection is sometimes raised that this collaboration of all States in promoting human rights constitutes interference in internal affairs. But surely it is true that the most certain means for a State to avoid external interference is precisely for it to recognize and ensure that, in the territories under its jurisdiction, fundamental rights and liberties are respected.

Without wishing to enter into the merits of the individual formulations, we consider that this outstanding document remains the expression of a more mature and more definite awareness of the question of the rights of the human person, and continues to represent the secure basis for the recognition of every man's title to worthy citizenship in the community of peoples.

It would, indeed, be deplorable for mankind if this solemn pronouncement were to be reduced to an empty recognition of values or to an abstract doctrinal principle without a concrete and increasingly coherent application in the contemporary world, as you yourself rightly pointed out when you assumed the Presidency of this honourable Assembly.

We are well aware that such application on the part of the public authorities is not without difficulties, but a concerted effort is required in order to ensure that these rights are respected and promoted by those with the power and the duty to do so, and that awareness of the fundamental rights and liberties of man is steadily developed among peoples. The cooperation of everyone must be sought to ensure that these principles are respected «by all, in all places and for all» (Message to the Teheran Conference for the Twentieth Anniversary of the Declaration of Human rights, AAS 60 (1968), p. 285). Is it really possible, then, without grave danger for the peaceful coexistence of peoples, to remain indifferent in the face of the many grave and often systematic violations of those human rights clearly proclaimed in the Declaration as universal, inviolable and

inalienable?

We cannot conceal our serious anxiety at the persistence and aggravation of situations which we bitterly deplore - situations such as racial and ethnic discrimination; obstacles to the self-determination of peoples; the repeated violations of the sacred right to religious liberty in its various aspects and the absence of an international agreement supporting this right and specifying its consequences; the inhumane treatment of prisoners; the violent and systematic elimination of political opponents; other forms of violence, and attacks on human life, especially on life in the womb. To all the silent victims of injustice we lend our voice of protest and of entreaty. But mere denunciation, often too late or ineffective, is not sufficient. There must be an analysis of the deep-rooted causes of such situations and a firm commitment to face up to them and resolve them correctly.

It is encouraging, however, to note that the men of our time are showing that they are not insensible to the fundamental values contained in the Universal Declaration. Is not the ever increasing number of denunciations and of recriminations, in fact, a significant symptom of this increasing sensibility in the face of the multiplication of offences against the inalienable liberties of man, both as an individual and in the community?

We have learned with lively interest and deep satisfaction that this General Assembly, on the occasion of the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the Universal Declaration, will hold a special session at which there will be proclaimed the Decade of Struggle against Racism and Racial Discrimination. This preeminently human undertaking will once again find the Holy See and the United Nations in close accord - albeit on different levels and with different means - in a common effort to defend and protect the freedom and dignity of every person and of every group, without distinction of race, 1 colour, language, creed or any particular social condition.

In this Message we also wish to underline the value and importance of the other documents on human rights previously approved by the United Nations. These documents, which came into being in accordance with the spirit and on the basis of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, represent a sure step forward in the promotion and concrete safeguarding of certain of those rights, and seek to guarantee their careful and faithful application. Their ratification will ensure their effectiveness in both national and international circles. The Holy See gives its moral adherence and offers its support to the legitimate and praiseworthy aspirations to which these documents are directed.

While the fundamental human rights represent a common good for the whole of mankind on its path towards the conquest of peace, it is necessary that all men, ever more conscious of this reality, should realize that, in this sphere, to speak of rights is the same as spelling out duties.

Thus we reiterate our good wishes to your noble and eminent Assembly, convinced as we are that

it will continue tirelessly to promote among the Nations respect for and application of the principles solemnly enunciated in the Universal Declaration, with a sincere effort to transform the human family into a world community of brothers in which all the sons of men can lead a life worthy of the sons of God.

10 décembre 1973

*ORa n.51 p.3.

Paths to Peace p.79-81.
