



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER PAUL VI
TO THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE
UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND****

Wednesday, 28 June 1978

Mr Executive Director,

with the approach of the International Year of the Child, we are indeed happy to have your visit. We welcome you as the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund, knowing that your organization has been designated by the General Assembly as the lead agency for the International Year.

We wish to state at once how much we appreciate the great good that UNICEF has done over the years for the children of the world. We have wholeheartedly supported all your worthy activities aimed at providing for the basic needs of children, while at the same time we have repeatedly expressed our dissociation from any involvement in projects that may directly or indirectly favour contraception, abortion or other practices that do not respect the supreme value of life.

With regard to the International Year of the Child, it had been the concern of the Holy See that such an event should not be the occasion for multiplying initiatives that would have no direct bearing on the welfare of children. The Holy See is pleased to note that the same concern has been manifested by the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization in determining the general objectives of IYC, which speak of "enhancing the awareness of the special needs of children on the part of decision-makers and the public", and which advocate "sustained activities for the benefit of children" (*General Assembly Resolution A/31/169*, of 21 December 1976, operative paragraph 2).

The interest of the Church in this event is in harmony with her constant solicitude throughout the centuries for children's welfare. This solicitude is an expression of her fidelity to the programme

enjoined on her by her Founder, Jesus Christ, who stated that “whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it” (*Luc. 18, 17*). Above all, Christ identifies the child with his own person: “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me” (*Marc. 9, 37*). For the Catholic Church, therefore, service to the child is not a transitory goal, but rather a permanent task invested with dignity and enduring priority.

A renewed concern for the real needs of children everywhere is furthermore dictated by a realistic awareness of the present situation of the world. Despite technological progress, children still suffer and die from lack of basic nourishment, or as victims of violence and armed conflicts that they do not even understand. Others are victims of emotional neglect. There are people who poison the minds of the young by passing on to them prejudices and empty ideologies. And today, children are exploited even to the point of being used to satisfy the lowest depravities of adults. A despicable aspect of this exploitation is the fact that it is often controlled by powerful forces motivated by financial gain.

Extending our gaze still further over the world situation, we see that there is another harmful discrimination to which the child is subject and which would worthily engage the full attention of IYC. In our time some people consider the child a burden and a restriction of freedom, rather than the living expression of the love of parents. Others deny to the child the fundamental right to have a mother and a father united in marriage. But all society must vigorously reply that the child indeed has the God-given right to be born, the right to a mother and father united in marriage, the right to be born into a normal family. It would be a form of contradiction if, on the occasion of the International Year of the Child, activities were to be promoted whose inspiration and purpose were to make children less welcome, or even to prevent them from being born into society.

In order to fulfil its aim, this Year is called to promote the inestimable value of the child in today's world: the child as a child, as a human person, and not simply as a potential adult. Childhood is an essential phase of human life, and every child has the right to live childhood to the full and to make an original contribution to the humanizing of society and to its development and renewal. All of us personally know this contribution of children to the world. Who has not been struck by children's simple, direct and innocent perception of situations, their open and loving generosity, their lack of prejudice and discrimination, their infectious joy and spontaneous sense of brotherhood, and also by their capacity for remarkable sacrifice and idealism?

The Church therefore stresses that every child is a human person and has the right to the integral development of his or her personality. The role of the family is irreplaceable in attaining this end, since the child cannot be understood and assisted apart from the family, which is the first educator towards physical, psychological, intellectual, moral and religious development. We also wish to encourage endeavours to extend services in favour of children, and to improve the quality of these services, especially on a permanent basis.

In all these efforts the child remains of central concern: each child and every child throughout the world. We are hopeful that new and revitalized projects will flourish to help needy children everywhere. And we are convinced that in this way the profound exigencies of the young and vulnerable human person will be met: in the first place the right to life, to truth, and to love.

We are pleased to note that many individual Catholics, Catholic organizations and local Churches are taking part in the preparation of IYC. Their effective contribution will be to rededicate themselves- in the spirit of fidelity to the Gospel message-to the needs of the child, and to develop appropriate programmes that will assist children in various aspects of their lives. We are confident that such programmes will give particular priority to the needs of disadvantaged children, the physically and mentally handicapped, those abandoned and those in special situations of distress and suffering.

With these sentiments we ask the blessing of God on all who labour to further these high ideals and we pray that the Lord will sustain you and all those who collaborate in this great work of human solidarity.

**Insegnamenti di Paolo VI, vol. XVI, p.515-518;*

OR 29.6.1978, p.1, 2;

ORa n.27 p.12;

Paths to Peace p.358-359.