

Statement of H.E. Archbishop Renato R. Martino
Apostolic Nuncio
Head of the Holy See Delegation
to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 4 June 1992

The people of the whole world look with keen interest and great expectations to this United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. The challenge facing the international community is how to reconcile the imperative duty of the protection of the environment with the basic right of all people to development.

I. The centrality of the human person.

The Catholic Church approaches both the care and protection of the environment and all questions regarding development from the point of view of **the human person**. It is the conviction of the Holy See, therefore, that all ecological programmes and all developmental initiatives must respect the **full dignity and freedom** of whomever might be affected by such programmes. They must be seen in relation to the needs of actual men and women, their families, their values, their unique social and cultural heritage, their responsibility toward future generations. For the ultimate purpose of environmental and developmental programmes is to enhance the quality of human life, to **place creation in the fullest way possible at the service of the human family**.

The ultimate determining factor is the human person. It is not simply science and technology, nor the increasing means of economic and material development, but the human person, and especially groups of persons, communities and nations, **freely choosing** to face the problems together, who will, under God, determine the future. (1)

The word **environment** itself means "that which surrounds". This very definition postulates the existence of a center around which the environment exists. That center is the human being, the only creature in this world who is not only capable of being conscious of itself and of its surroundings, but is gifted with the intelligence to explore, the sagacity to utilize, and is ultimately responsible for its choices and the consequences of those choices. The praiseworthy heightened awareness of the present generation for all components of the environment, and

the consequent efforts at preserving and protecting them, rather than weakening the central position of the human being, accentuate its role and responsibilities.

Likewise, it cannot be forgotten that the true purpose of every economic, social and political system and of every model of **development** is the integral advancement of the human person. Development is clearly something much more extensive than merely economic progress measured in terms of gross national product. True development takes as its criterion the human person with all the needs, just expectations and fundamental rights that are his or hers. (2)

Complementing respect for the human person and human life is the responsibility to respect all creation. God is creator and planner of the entire universe. The universe and life in all its forms are a testimony to God's creative power, His Love, His enduring presence. All creation reminds us of the mystery and love of God. As the Book of Genesis tells us: "And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good." (Gen 1:31)

II. The moral dimension.

In the very early stages that led to the convening of this Conference, the General Assembly emphasized that "in view of the global character of major environmental problems, there is a common interest of all countries in pursuing policies aimed at achieving a sustainable and environmentally sound development within a sound ecological balance." (3)

The Holy See has been and continues to be keenly interested in the issues which this Conference is addressing. During the laborious preparatory phases, the Holy See delegation has carefully and respectfully examined the many proposals of technological, scientific and political nature put forth and appreciates the contributions made by so many participants in the process. Faithful to its nature and its mission, the Holy See has continued to emphasize the rights and the duties, the well-being and the responsibilities of individuals and of societies. For the Holy See the problems of environment and development are, at their root, **issues of a moral, ethical nature**, from which derive two obligations: the urgent imperative to find solutions and the inescapable demand that every proposed solution meet the criteria of truth and justice.

"Theology, philosophy and science all speak of a harmonious universe, of a "cosmos" endowed with its own integrity, its own internal, dynamic balance. **This order must be respected.** The human race is called to explore this order, to examine it with due care and to make use of it while safeguarding its integrity." (4) The Creator has placed the human beings at the center of creation, making them the responsible stewards, not the exploiting despots, of the world around them. "On the other hand, the earth is ultimately **a common heritage, the fruits of which are for the benefits of all.** This has direct consequences for the problem at hand. It is manifestly unjust that a privileged few should continue to accumulate excess goods, squandering available resources, while masses of people are living in conditions of misery at the very lowest level of subsistence. Today, the dramatic threat of ecological breakdown is teaching us the extent to which greed and selfishness -- both individual and collective -- are contrary to the order of creation, an order which is characterized by mutual interdependence." (5)

III. The resulting obligations: Stewardship and Solidarity.

The concepts of an ordered universe and a common heritage both point to the necessity of developing in the heart of every individual and in the activities of every society a true sense of **stewardship** and of **solidarity**.

It is the obligation of a responsible steward to be one who cares for the goods entrusted to him and not one who plunders, to be one who conserves and enhances and not one who destroys and dissipates. Humility, and not arrogance, must be the proper attitude of humankind vis-à-vis the environment. The exciting scientific discoveries of our century have enabled the human mind to pierce with equal success into the infinitesimally small as well as into the immeasurably large. The results have been ambivalent, for we have witnessed that, without ethics, science and technology can be employed to kill as well as to save lives, to manipulate as well as to nurture, to destroy as well as to build.

Responsible stewardship demands a consideration for the common good: no one person, no one group of people in isolation are allowed to determine their relationship with the universe. The universal common good transcends all private interests, all national boundaries, and reaches, beyond the present moment, to the future generations.

Hence, **solidarity** becomes an urgent moral imperative. We are all part of God's creation -- we live as a human family. The whole of creation is everyone's heritage. All equally created by God, called to share the goods and the beauty of the one world, human beings are called to enter into a solidarity of universal dimensions, "a cosmic fraternity" animated by the very love that flows from God. Education to solidarity is an urgent necessity of our day. We must learn again to live in harmony, not only with God and with one another, but with creation itself. The "Canticle of Creatures" of Francis of Assisi could well become the anthem of a new generation that loves and respects in one embrace the Creator and all God's creatures.

Responsible **stewardship** and genuine **solidarity** are not only directed to the protection of the environment, but, equally so, to the inalienable right and duty of all peoples to development. The earth's resources and the means to their access and use must be wisely monitored and justly shared. The demands for the care and protection of the environment cannot be used to obstruct the right to development, nor can development be invoked in thwarting the environment. The task of achieving a just balance is today's challenge.

The scandalous patterns of consumption and waste of all kinds of resources by a few must be corrected, in order to ensure justice and sustainable development to all, everywhere in the world. Pope John Paul II has reminded that: "Simplicity, moderation and discipline, as well as a spirit of sacrifice, must become part of everyday life, lest all suffer the negative consequences of the careless habits of a few." (6) The developing countries, in their legitimate ambition to improve their status and emulate existing patterns of development, will realize and counteract the danger that can derive to their people and to the world by the adoption of highly wasteful growth strategies hitherto widely employed, that have led humanity into the present situation.

New resources, the discovery of substitute new materials, determined efforts at conservation and recycling programmes have assisted in the protection of known reserves; the development of new technologies has the promise of using resources more efficiently.

For developing nations, at times rich in natural resources, the acquisition and use of new technologies is a clear necessity. Only an equitable global sharing of technology will make possible the process of sustainable development.

When considering the problems of environment and development one must also pay due attention to the complex issue of population. The position of the Holy See regarding procreation is frequently misinterpreted. The Catholic Church does not propose procreation at any cost. It keeps on insisting that the transmission of, and the caring for human life must be exercised with an utmost sense of responsibility. It restates its constant position that human life is sacred; that the aim of public policy is to enhance the welfare of families; that it is the right of the spouses to decide on the size of the family and spacing of births, without pressures from governments or organizations. This decision must fully respect the moral order established by God, taking into account the couple's responsibilities toward each other, the children they already have and the society to which they belong. (7) What the Church opposes is the imposition of demographic policies and the promotion of methods for limiting births which are contrary to the objective moral order and to the liberty, dignity and conscience of the human being. At the same time, the Holy See does not consider people as mere numbers, or only on economic terms. (8) It emphatically states its concern that the poor not be singled out as if, by their very existence, they were the cause, rather than the victims, of the lack of development and of environmental degradation.

Serious as the problem of interrelation among environment, development and population is, it cannot be solved in an over-simplistic manner and many of the most alarming predictions have proven false and have been discredited by a number of recent studies. "People are born not only with mouths that need to be fed, but also with hands that can produce, and minds that can create and innovate." (9) As for the environment, just to mention one instance, countries with as few as 5% of the world population are responsible for more than one quarter of the principal greenhouse gas, while countries with up to a quarter of the world population contribute as little as 5% of the same greenhouse gas.

A serious and concerted effort aimed at protecting the environment and at promoting development will not be possible without **directly addressing the structural forms of poverty** that exist throughout the world. Environment is devastated and development thwarted by the outbreak of wars, when internal conflicts destroy homes, fields and factories, when intolerable circumstances force millions of people to desperately seek refuge away from their lands, when minorities are oppressed, when the rights of the most vulnerable -- women, children, the aged and the infirm -- are neglected or abused.

"The poor, to whom the earth is entrusted no less than to others, must be enabled to find a way out of their poverty. This will require a courageous reform of structures, as well as new ways of relating among peoples and States." (10)

Finally, the Holy See invites the international community to discover and affirm that there is a **spiritual dimension** to the issues at hand. Human beings have the need for and the right to more than clean air and water, to more than economic and technological progress. Human beings are also fragile and an alarm must be sounded against the poisoning of the minds and the corruption of the hearts, both in the developed and developing worlds. The dissemination of hatred, of falsehood and vice, the traffic and use of narcotic drugs, the ruthless self-centeredness which disregards the rights of others -- even the right to life -- are all phenomena that cannot be gauged by technical instrument, but whose chain-effects destroy individuals and societies. Let us strive to give to every man, woman and child a safe and healthy physical environment, let us join forces in providing them with real opportunities for development, but, in the process, let us not allow them to be robbed of their souls. On a closely related level, the **aesthetic** value of the environment must also be considered and protected, thus adding beauty and inspiring artistic expression to the developmental activities.

The Holy See regards this Conference as a major challenge and a unique opportunity that the people of the world are presenting to the international community. The problems facing today's world are serious indeed and even threatening. Nonetheless, the opportunity is at hand. Avoiding confrontation, and engaging in honest dialogue and sincere solidarity, all forces must be joined in a positive adventure of unprecedented magnitude and cooperation that will restore hope to the human family and renew the face of the earth.

1. Cf. Address of Pope John Paul II to the United Nations Centre for the Environment. Nairobi, 18 August 1985.
2. Cf. Address of Pope John Paul II to the 21st Session of the Conference of the Food and Agricultural Organization. The Vatican, 13 November 1981.
3. Resolution 43/196 of the General Assembly, 20 December 1988.
4. Message of Pope John Paul II for the 1990 World Day of Peace on the theme "Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation". 8 December 1989. n.8.
5. Ibidem.
6. Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace. o.c., n.13.
7. Cf. Message of His Eminence Cardinal Maurice Roy, President of the Pontifical Commission "Justice and Peace" to H.E. U Thant, Secretary-General of the United Nations, on the occasion of the launching of the Second Development Decade. The Vatican, 19 November 1970.

8. Cf. Address of Pope John Paul II to Mr. Rafael Salas, Secretary-General of the 1984 International Conference on Population, and Executive Director of the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA). The Vatican, 7 June 1984.n
9. The Wall Street Journal, in "Review and Outlook": Prince Malthus, Tuesday, April 28, 1992.
10. Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace, o.c., n.11.

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