



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO RAFAEL M. SALAS, SECRETARY GENERAL
OF THE 1984 INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION***

Thursday, 7 June 1984

*To Dr. Rafael M. Salas
Secretary General of the 1984 International Conference on Population
and Executive Director
of the United Nations Fund for Population Activities*

1. I am pleased to welcome you here today and to share with you some reflections on the coming 1984 International Conference on Population, for which you have been designated Secretary General. This Conference, to be held in Mexico City in August 1984, provides an opportunity for a re-examination of many important issues related to population growth or decline some 10 years after the World Population Conference in 1974. The Holy See has followed the discussions of population during these years, and has studied *the implications of the demographic factors for the entire human family*. It is readily apparent that the world-wide population situation is very complex and varies from region to region. Behind the demographic facts there are many interrelated issues that have to do with improving the circumstances of living so that people can live in dignity, justice and peace, so that they can exercise the God-given right to form families, to bear and bring up children, and so that they can pursue their eternal destiny, which is union with the loving God who has created them. Thus, the Catholic Church takes positive note of the concern for improving systems of education and health care, recognizing the roles of aging persons, obtaining greater opportunities for people to be active participants in the development process and in constructing a new global economic system based on justice and equity.

2. The Church recognizes the role of governments and of the international community to study and to face with responsibility the population problem in the context of and with a view to the common

good of individual nations and of all humanity (cf. Pauli VI, *Populorum Progressio*, 37). But demographic policies must not consider people as mere numbers, or only in economic terms, or with any kind of prejudice. They must respect and promote the dignity and the fundamental rights of the human person and of the family.

The *dignity of the human person* - of each and every person - and his or her uniqueness and capacity to contribute to the well-being of society are of primary importance to the Church when entering into discussions about population. For the Church believes that human dignity is based on the fact that God has created each person, that we have been redeemed by Christ, and that, according to the Divine Plan, we shall rejoice with God forever. The Church must always stand as a sign and safeguard of the transcendent character of the human person (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 76), restoring hope to those who might otherwise despair of anything better than their present lot. This conviction of the Church is shared by others and is in harmony with the most secret desires of the human heart and responds to the deepest longings of the human person. The dignity of the person, then, is a value of universal importance, one that is upheld by people of differing religious, cultural and national backgrounds. This emphasis on the value of the person demands respect for human life, which is always a splendid gift of God's goodness. Against the pessimism and selfishness which cast a shadow over the world, the Church stands for life and calls for ever greater efforts to correct those situations that endanger or diminish the value and appropriate enjoyment of human life. Thus, I recall the words of my Apostolic Exhortation "*Familiaris Consortio*", which reflect the consensus of the 1980 World Synod of Bishops on the family in the modern world:

"The Church is called upon to manifest anew to everyone, with clear and stronger conviction, her will to promote human life by every means and to defend it against all attacks, in whatever condition or state of development it is found".

"Thus the Church condemns as a grave offence against human dignity and justice all those activities of governments or other public authorities which attempt to limit in any way the freedom of couples in deciding about children. Consequently any violence applied by such authorities in favour of contraception or, still worse, of sterilization and procured abortion, must be altogether condemned and forcefully rejected. Likewise to be denounced as gravely unjust are cases where, in international relations, economic help given for the advancement of peoples is made conditional on programmes of contraception, sterilization and procured abortion" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 30) .

The experiences and trends of recent years clearly emphasize the profoundly negative effects of contraceptive programmes. These programmes have increased sexual permissiveness and promoted irresponsible conduct, with grave consequences especially for the education of youth and the dignity of women. The very notion of "*responsible* parenthood" and "*family* planning" has been violated by the distribution of contraceptives to adolescents. Moreover, from contraceptive

programmes a transition has in fact often been made to the practice of sterilization and abortion, financed by governments and international organizations.

3. The Church stresses *the importance of the family*, which is "the natural and fundamental group unit of society, and is entitled to protection by society and the State" (*Universalis declaratio hominis iurium*, 16, 3). At the request of the international Synod of Bishops, the Holy See itself has issued a *Charter on the Rights of the Family* in which it "urges all States, International Organizations, and all interested Institutions and persons to promote respect for these rights and to secure their effective recognition and observance" (*Chartula de familiae iuribus*, prooem.). In this document, the family is recognized as "a community of love and solidarity which is uniquely suited to teach and transmit cultural, ethical, social, spiritual and religious values, essential to the well-being of its own members and of society" (*Ibid.*, prooem., E.). The family is truly a community of persons bound together by love, by mutual concern, by commitments to the past and to the future. While the primary members of the family are the spouses and their children, it is important to maintain an awareness of the family as a community where the different generations come together, and whose strength it is to provide a place of identity and security for relatives and for those who are assimilated into it.

The family has a unique and irreplaceable role in handing on the gift of life and in providing the best environment for the education of children and their introduction into society. It is in the family primarily that the child finds love and acceptance from the moment of conception and throughout the process of growth and development. Insecurity about the future should not diminish our hope and joy in children. Now more than ever before we must reaffirm our belief in the value of the child, and in the contributions that today's children can make to the entire human family. As I said before the United Nations General Assembly: ". . . In the presence of the representatives of so many nations of the world gathered here, I wish to express the joy that we all find in children, the springtime of life, the anticipation of the future history of each of our present earthly homelands. No country on earth, no political system can think of its own future otherwise than through the image of these new generations that will receive from their parents the manifold heritage of values, duties and aspirations of the nation to which they belong and of the whole human family. Concern for the child, even before birth, from the first moment of conception and then throughout the years of infancy and youth, is the primary and fundamental test of the relationship of one human being to another".

4. Yet we all know that the spouses' decision in favour of childbearing and childrearing is not always easy and often occasions sacrifice. The Church is realistically aware of this, and her teaching on *responsible parenthood* concerns married couples - who *alone* have the right to procreation - to assist them in making what must be a free, informed and mutual decision regarding the spacing of births and the size of the family. This decision should be based on their prayerful and generous appreciation of their association with God in the work of creation, and their responsibilities to themselves, to their children, to their family and to society. It should be a

decision that is based on morally acceptable methods of spacing or limiting births, about which it is the right and duty of the Church to speak. On the other hand, it is the role of governments and of international organizations to assist married couples by creating a socio-economic order conducive to family life, childbearing and childrearing, and by providing accurate information on the demographic situation so that couples may properly assess their duties and their capabilities.

5. Special attention should be given to the *role of women in modern society*. Improving the status of women is important. In this regard we should not overlook the contributions that women make in the home and in their unique capacity to nurture the infant and guide the child in the earliest phase of education. This particular contribution of women is often ignored or diminished in favour of economic considerations or employment opportunities, and sometimes even in order to decrease the number of children. Continued efforts should be made to ensure the full integration of women in society, while giving due recognition to their important social role as mothers. This should include maternal and child health care, proper maternal leave, and family income supplements.

The Church is also aware of the initiatives in favour of *the aging* sponsored by the UNFPA. The number of aging persons is increasing in most countries. Their needs are often overlooked, and also the contribution they make to society. They bring experience, wisdom and a special patience to the solution of human problems, and they can and should be active members of contemporary society.

6. Much attention is given to the *relationship of population to development*. It is widely recognized that a population policy is only one part of an overall development strategy. Once again, the Church emphasizes that the needs of families should be a primary consideration in development strategies, that families should be encouraged to assume responsibility for transforming society and be active participants in the development process. Yet development itself should be more than a pursuit of material benefits; it should involve a more comprehensive approach that respects and satisfies the spiritual as well as the material needs of each person and of the whole of society. In a word, development strategies should be based on a just world-wide socio-economic order directed towards an equitable sharing of created goods, respectful stewardship of the environment and natural resources, and a sense of moral responsibility and cooperation among nations in order to achieve peace, security and economic stability for all. Above all, development should not be interpreted simply in terms of population control, nor should governments or international agencies make development assistance dependent on the achievement of family planning goals.

At this time, Mr. Secretary General, I would appeal to you and through you to all those participating in the 1984 International Conference on Population, to face the issues of population with renewed confidence in the human person, and in the power that moral and spiritual values have to contribute to the true solution of human problems in our day. May God himself assist you to fulfil this important task.

From the Vatican, June 7, 1984.

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