



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE ASSEMBLY OF ORGANIZATIONS
FOR AID TO THE EASTERN CHURCHES (ROACO)**

Thursday, 26 June 2003

1. I am delighted to welcome you, dear members of ROACO who have come together in Rome at your annual meeting, and I offer my cordial welcome to each one. I address a special greeting to the Prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, Cardinal Ignace Moussa I Daoud, and I thank him for expressing your common sentiments. I extend my greeting to the Secretary, Archbishop Vegliò, to the Undersecretary, the Officials and Staff of the Dicastery, as well as to the Apostolic Nuncio in Israel and Apostolic Delegate in Jerusalem and Palestine, to the Custodian of the Holy Land, to the directors of the Agencies, to the Authorities of Bethlehem University and to all who are here.

2. You are a great help to the Churches of the Christian East with your generosity. This is particularly appreciated in light of recent tragic events. I am thinking of the recent war in Iraq, of the conflict in the Holy Land which unfortunately continues, as well as to the enduring famine in Eritrea and Ethiopia. Your collaboration through the medium of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches makes present and active the Church's charity, as well as the Pope's personal concern. It is necessary to intensify this work and to widen the fields of action; above all, you must nurture the spirit of divine charity which, recognizing all that is received from God as a free gift, disposes us to share it with our brethren in the service of an authentic human promotion. In my recent Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* I wrote that the Eucharist "spurs us on our journey through history and plants a seed of living hope in our daily commitment to the work before us. Certainly the Christian vision leads to the expectation of 'new heavens' and 'a new earth' (Rv 21: 1), but this *increases, rather than lessens, our sense of responsibility for the world today* (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 39)". This is why Christians must feel obliged more than ever not to neglect their duties as citizens in this world, contributing with the light of the Gospel to building a more human world that is in full harmony with God's plan (cf. n. 20).

3. You rightly pay special attention to the territories of the Holy Land because of what this region, sanctified by Jesus, means to all Christians. There is a special Collection for it, and my venerable Predecessors, beginning with Leo XIII, insisted that all Catholic communities contribute generously to it. Alas, the Holy Land continues to be the scene of conflicts and violence, and the Catholic communities there are suffering and in need of support and help for their many urgent needs. From those peoples rises a heartfelt invocation for a stable and lasting peace. Thank you for all you do! Thank you for the caring solidarity you have shown to the Christians harshly tried in Iraq by the recent war. I pray God that peace will be achieved rapidly in that country, and that the peoples, so tried for so long, partly because of a lengthy international isolation, may at last live in concord. I am certain that your interventions, which aim to set up pastoral and social institutions in support of believers,

will cooperate in giving life to a better future for the whole nation.⁴ Dear Brothers and Sisters! The service you are rendering to the Christian East is always very attentive to all the needs of the local Churches. Besides structures and buildings, although these are indispensable, it is at times more necessary to help form consciences and to safeguard the faith inherited from the ancestors. This requires an appropriate catechesis, the care of the liturgy proper to the Church of participation, an attention to the formation of the clergy and laity, an enlightened openness to ecumenism and a prophetic presence that supports the poor. The Pope thanks you for responding to the situations presented to you with intelligence, sparing no efforts or resources. At the same time, you express the gratitude of all the Communities to whose needs you give a concrete response. Your experience shows that still today the Christian East has a deep desire to meet, know and love more and more God, who has revealed his merciful face in Christ. Eastern Christians want a living experience of Christ, especially where for decades an attempt was made to wipe out even traces of him, and where instability and war seek to erode the ancient foundations of the Eastern Churches.⁵ To this end, I assure you of my prayers. Dear Brothers and Sisters, may the constant divine assistance accompany you in your daily activities, as a pledge of which I cordially impart to you all my Blessing, which I willingly extend to the Organizations you represent, to your families, to the Dioceses and to the Communities to which you belong.