



The Holy See

*Message to the President of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements**

We are happy to address our greeting to you today and to express to the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements our profound satisfaction at seeing - as the preparation and organization of your labours prove - that the international community is acquiring an ever greater consciousness of the importance of the questions submitted for your study.

Periodically, the drama of earthquakes recalls to public opinion the place which a dwelling occupies in the life and in the hearts of people. You know that individuals, groups, entire sectors of people live permanently - either always, or under the pressures of social changes - in the situation of those whom nature suddenly deprives of their home and their living environment. The preparatory works of this Conference tell us that it is no longer possible to ignore such a situation or to grow accustomed to it or to tolerate it. Nor has your Conference assembled in order to deplore with resignation the enormous and growing deficiencies in the matter of the habitat, but to reanimate and sustain the courage of builders, and to seek original and magnanimous solutions to the most urgent problems, so that each person can have - together with a worthy and attractive dwelling - the normal services of health, hygiene and communication, within a framework of life that permits his or her full physical and spiritual progress.

In this message, it is not for us to suggest technical solutions, but we wish before all else to reiterate to you our confidence in the person and in his capacity to enlarge ceaselessly the area of what is possible, if his intelligence and heart are committed to a truly human existence for all his brothers and sisters. And we would also like to recall certain essential principles which can inspire and stimulate the reflection of this Conference and the competent work of those who will subsequently be called upon to put these programmes into practice.

Human beings constitute the most important element in the universe.» We rejoice to see this affirmation heading the General Principles which guide your labours. In effect the centre and fundamental priority of all programmes must be the person: the person in all his dimensions and

all his dignity, the individual and social being, natural and historical, corporal and spiritual.

But all persons share in the same dignity. All life bears in itself an intrinsic quality. And this demands that conditions for fully human progress should be ensured for all people in their habitat.

The home, that is to say, the centre of warmth in which the family is united and the children grow in love, must remain the first concern of every programme relative to the human environment.

But this presupposes that the family and all its members are helped to be educated about, the meaning and value of life, about the means of reaching true happiness. How many parents, shower their children with secondary and passing things, but take little interest in giving them, in the home, a little space and peace for their balanced development? How many parents do not know how to arouse in their children an interest in the running and embellishment of their home, and do not prepare them to collaborate tomorrow in the perfecting of the human environment?

It also seems to us important that the Conference, while noting the primary role of technicians and creative geniuses with an enlightened social sense, should show a great confidence in the active and constructive participation of people; that it should mobilize the material and moral energies of all, even the apparently most humble, in the framework of programmes proportioned to their real possibilities, their legitimate aspirations and their particular cultural conditions.

We have already on several occasions manifested our conviction that international Organizations are necessary in order to specify the exigencies of justice between peoples and to render effective the good resolutions of solidarity among individuals. The present Conference fulfills this role by making once more possible the affirmation by all the nations of a clear political will and a serious spirit of collaboration; by enabling international cooperation to be expressed in bold, realistic and precise programmes; by ensuring that these programmes will be taken up and sustained by the decisions of the United Nations and that they will be integrated, as an essential element, into this new international economic order that has to be ceaselessly built up.

Finally, it seems to us important for a Conference like yours to form for itself a complete vision of reality by looking at the past, the present and the future.

The past, in order to take note of the valid and diverse experiences left to us by the tradition of peoples, for, even in accepting lights coming from outside, each people has always had a special insight in order to solve the problems proper to it.

The present, in order to appreciate the gravity of the present phenomena regarding the habitat, but by going beyond immediate appearances and seeking the real causes, moral or physical, of the present ills: it is at this price that fresh errors of orientation will be avoided.

The future, in order to challenge people's imaginations and to call forth great and original projects that will measure up to the future: for there is a new civilization, very close, in which we shall face the alternative either of the accumulation of calamities that destroy the human environment or of the courageous establishment of a habitat, worthy and honourable, for all.

Mr. President, we express our warm good wishes that this Conference will respond to the hopes placed in it. We know that the efforts of all its members will be directed towards giving to each individual the chance of finding a dwelling in a fully human setting. In anticipation, we thank you and invoke the blessings of heaven upon your work.

The Vatican, 24 May 1976.

PAULUS PP. VI

*ORa n.25 p.3.

Paths to Peace p.421-422.