



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER PAUL VI TO THE INTERNATIONAL CIVIL AVIATION ORGANIZATION*

Wednesday, 19 September 1973

Mr. Secretary General, Gentlemen,

We very willingly accepted the desire you manifested for this meeting on behalf of participants in the extraordinary Session of the International Civil Aviation Organization and the international diplomatic Conference on air law. Your words, Mr. Secretary General, clearly indicate what is at stake in the human discussion that holds all our attention.

Certainly, on account of its quite particular nature, the Holy See would seem to be less affected as regards itself, by the practical measures you are working out for the States on the repression of the unlawful capture of aircraft. We thank you all the more for inviting it to your work, as an observer at the general Assembly and as a plenipotentiary at the Conference table. You are convinced, in fact, that the welfare of man was jeopardized. Not just the rights of innocent persons – rights which, in our eyes, are always inviolable – but also that which can be called the international common good: the security that all passengers of international civil aviation are entitled to expect from such a service, vital for international relations today, as also the possibility of attaining peace by means that exclude violence. Now, you know how these aims of justice and peace, and international law, coincide, at their highest level, with the message of the Catholic Church, and how intensely they are desired by the Holy See.

You do not expect us, this morning, to go into the complexity of the work which you have made a point of carrying out constantly on the two complementary planes. The terms are difficult to define, the processes difficult to put into execution. This search for the most adequate juridical instruments, that is for those that are most just and most efficacious, will have been, in the course of this month, considering the effective concurrence and the firm commitment of the participants, a task demanding patience. But we think it useful to reaffirm here the principles of international law

which, in the conscience of a civilized world and, all the more, in the Christian conscience, should always suggest technical solutions.

And in the first place, we deplore, we condemn violence. We consider it an aberration to have recourse to violence of a general nature but especially when it is a question of that specific form of violence which some people call international terrorism and air piracy. These excesses in fact, involve persons, who are extraneous to the conflict which it is desired to exacerbate, as women and children can be. They compromise the safety of international transport, increase ruin and resentment. They slow down the march towards peace. "Like other facts", we mentioned 13 September 1970, "which the whole civilized world condemns today – the imprisonment of innocent creatures, the torture of political prisoners, the clandestine and lucrative trade in drugs – these outrageous acts of piracy, unjust reprisals and inadmissible blackmail should never occur again" (cf L'Osservatore Romano, 14-15 September 1970). Moreover, thank God, the reprobation not just of individuals, but also of many groups, seems more and more clear and unanimous. We wish to see in this a wisdom that promises well, the wisdom that seeks others ways more in conformity with reason and justice.

May the search for the causes of such aberrations be equally unanimous! "It is a grave and urgent problem", we said at the beginning of this year to the members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, "which it devolves upon all the partners to solve together, with an honest approach, without omitting to draw attention, too, to the causes of this phenomenon, its methods and its motives" (A.A.S. 65, 1973, p. 39-40). The latter may be deplorable and mask very particular interests. They may also be brought forth by poverty, frustration, and despair, the result of conditions deemed intolerable from the social, political and economic point of view. So a revolt breaks out, anarchical or organized, which people hope will bear fruit in its immediate results or at least in international public opinion. All countries in the world must recognize such causes, if they exist, in order to remedy them before they degenerate into violence. The struggle against terrorism would be weak, indeed, without this awareness, and without the tenacious determination to remove as far as possible the reasons for it, and this by suitable ways which do not aggravate injustice.

However, we clearly declare, such causes cannot justify recourse to violence exerted on civil aircraft, on their pilots and passengers. No, in this field as in others, the end does not justify the means. This is particularly evident when such unjust means are used, so dangerous for aerial navigation as a whole. This grave problem cannot pass, either, from the civil to the political domain. We mean, it cannot let itself be encumbered with partial political considerations. Or else it is necessary to envisage politics in the highest sense, that of the safeguarding of the international common good, guaranteed by Conventions on international agreements, if possible by multilateral ones, in the lack of an international public authority. We form the wish that all the members of the international community will reach the stage of ratifying such agreements, in the conviction that ultimately their own interest, also, is involved.

Is it a dream to think that mankind is capable of rising to such an awareness, with the help of the Almighty who inspires this wish in the heart of every human being worthy of the name? We do not think so. It is what we called in our message for World Peace Day, on 1 January 1973, "a strict and peaceful law to govern international relations": Are you not fundamentally in search of such a law?

The Church, on her side, will not rest until she has formed the conscience of all her children and invited all men of goodwill to promote this security, protect universal human rights, to defend them courageously, and to bring about a justice for all, for innocent victims as for unjustly oppressed populations. Every man is entitled to respect for his inviolable dignity: every man is a brother. Violence is an inhuman language to solve human conflicts. The golden rule remains reason and love. That is the Creator's plan. Without this moral contribution, the most highly perfected juridical instruments run the risk of being foiled and made inoperative one day of another. It is with this sentiment that we encourage too, with particular admiration, qualified authorities such as yours, which implement international solidarity in this particularly important and vulnerable field. Your responsibility is great: great, too, is that of the Governments. We willingly implore on your enterprise the Spirit of justice and peace of the All High.

*ORa n.41 p.3