

Text of Address at United Nations

Mr. President,

1. I desire to express my gratitude to the General Assembly of the United Nations, which I am permitted today to participate in and to address. My thanks go in the first place to the Secretary General of the United Nations organization, Dr. Kurt Waldheim. Last autumn, soon after my election to the chair of St. Peter, he invited me to make this visit, and he renewed his invitation in the course of our meeting in Rome last May. From the first moment I felt greatly honored and deeply obliged. And today, before this distinguished assembly, I also thank you, Mr. President, who have so kindly welcomed me and invited me to speak.

2. The formal reason for my intervention today is, without any question, the special bond of cooperation that links the Apostolic See with the United Nations organization, as is shown by the presence of the Holy See's permanent observer to this organization. The existence of this bond, which is held in high esteem by the Holy See, rests on the sovereignty with which the Apostolic See has been endowed for many centuries.

The territorial extent of that sovereignty is limited to the small State of Vatican City, but the sovereignty itself is warranted by the need of the papacy to exercise its mission in full freedom, and to be able to deal with any interlocutor, whether a government or an international organization, without dependence on other sovereignties. Of course the nature and aims of the spiritual mission of the Apostolic See and the Church make their participation in the tasks and activities of the United Nations organization very different from that of the states, which are communities in the political and temporal sense.

3. BESIDES attaching great importance to its collaboration with the United Nations organization, the Apostolic See has always, since the foundation of your organization, expressed its esteem and its agreement with the historic significance of this supreme forum for the international life of humanity today. It also never ceases to support your organization's functions and initiatives, which are aimed at peaceful coexistence and collaboration between nations. There are many proofs of this. In the more than 30 years of the existence of the United Nations organization, it has received much attention in papal messages and encyclicals, in documents of the Catholic episcopate, and likewise in the Second Vatican Council. Pope John XXIII and Pope Paul VI looked with confidence on your important institution as an eloquent and promising sign of our times. He who is now addressing you has, since the first months of his pontificate, several times expressed the same confidence and conviction as his predecessors.

4. This confidence and conviction on the part of the Apostolic See is the result, as I have said, not of merely political reasons but of the religious and moral character of the mission of the Roman Catholic Church. As a universal community embracing faithful belonging to almost all countries and continents, nations, peoples, races, languages and cultures, the Church is deeply interested in

'I also hope for a special statute that would respect the particular nature of Jerusalem, a heritage sacred to the veneration of millions of believers of the three great monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.'

the existence and activity of the organization whose very name tells us that it unites and associates nations and states. It unites and associates; it does not divide and oppose. It seeks out the ways for understanding and peaceful collaboration, and endeavors with the means at its disposal and the methods in its power to exclude war, division and mutual destruction within the great family of humanity today.

5. This is the real reason, the essential reason, for my presence among you, and I wish to thank this distinguished assembly for giving consideration to this reason, which can make my presence among you in some way useful. It is certainly a highly significant fact that among you in the representatives of the states, whose *raison d'être* is the sovereignty of powers linked with territory and people, there is also today the representative of the Apostolic See and the Catholic Church. This Church is the church of Jesus Christ, who declared before the tribunal of the Roman judge, Pilate, that he was a king, but with a kingdom not of this world (cf. John 18: 36-37).

WHEN HE was then asked about the reason for the existence of his kingdom among men, he explained: "For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth" (John 18: 37). Here, before the representatives of the states, I wish not only to thank you but also to offer my special congratulations, since the invitation extended to the pope to speak in your assembly shows that the United Nations organization accepts and respects the religious and moral dimension of those human problems that it is her duty to bring to the world.

The questions that concern your functions and receive your attention — as is indicated by the vast organic complex of institutions and activities that are part of or collaborate with the United Nations, especially in the fields of culture, health, food, labor and the peaceful uses of nuclear



Photo by Terrance J. Brennan

The pope speaks at the assembly in Security Council Chambers.

energy — certainly make it essential for us to meet in the name of man in his wholeness, in all the fullness and manifold riches of his spiritual and material existence, as I have stated in my encyclical "Redemptor Hominis," the first of my pontificate.

6. Now, availing myself of the solemn occasion of my meeting with the representatives of the nations of the earth, I wish above all to send my greetings to all the men and women living on this planet. To every man and every woman, without any exception whatever. Every human being living on earth is a member of a civil society, of a nation, many of them represented here.

EACH ONE of you, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, represents a particular state, system and political structure, but what you represent above all are individual human beings; you are all representatives of men and women, of practically all the people of the world, individual men and women, communities and peoples who are living the present phase of their own history and who are also part of the history of humanity as a whole, each of them a subject endowed with dignity as a human person, with his or her own culture, experiences and aspirations, tensions and sufferings and legitimate expectations.

This relationship is what provides the reason for all political activity, whether national or international, for in the final analysis this activity comes from man, is exercised by man and is for man. And if political activity is cut off from this fundamental relationship and finality, if it becomes in a way its own end, it loses much of its reason to exist. Even more, it can also give rise to a specific alienation; it can become extraneous to man; it can come to contradict humanity itself.

In reality, what justifies the existence of any political activity is service to man, concerned and responsible attention to the essential problems and duties of his early existence in its social dimension and significance, on which also the good of each person depends.

7. I ASK YOU, ladies and gentlemen, to excuse me for speaking of questions that are certainly self-evident for you. But it does not seem pointless to speak of them, since the most frequent pitfall for human activities is the possibility of losing sight, while performing them, of the clearest truths, the most elementary principle.

I would like to express the wish that, in view of its universal character, the United Nations organization will never cease to be the forum, the high tribune from which all man's problems are approached in truth and justice. It was the name of this inspiration, it was through this historic stimulus, that on June 26, 1945, towards the end of the terrible Second World War, the Charter of the United Nations was signed and on the following Oct. 24 your organization began its life. Soon after, on Dec. 10, 1948, came its fundamental document, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the rights of the human being as a concrete individual and of the human being in his universal value. This document is a milestone on the long and difficult path of the human race.

The progress of humanity must be measured not only by the progress of science and technology, which shows man's uniqueness with regard to nature, but also and chiefly by the primacy given to spiritual values and by the progress of moral life. In this field is manifested and full dominion of reason, through truth, in the behavior of the individual and of society, and also control of reason over nature; and the human conscience quietly triumphs, as was expressed in the ancient saying, "Genus humanum a terra et ratione vivit."

IT WAS when technology was being directed in its one-sided progress towards goals of war, hegemony and conquest, so that man might kill man and nation destroy nation by depriving it of its liberty and the right to exist — and I still have before my mind the image of the Second World War in Europe, which began 40 years ago on Sept. 1, 1939 with the invasion of Poland and ended on May 9, 1945 — it was precisely then that the United Nations organization arose.

And three years later the document appeared which, as I have said, must be considered a real milestone on the path

of the moral progress of humanity — the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The governments and states of the world have understood that, if they are not to attack and destroy each other, they must unite. The real way, the

'Each person lives in a particular concrete social and historical context, but each analysis must start from the premise that every human being is endowed with a dignity that must never be lessened or destroyed.'

fundamental way is to this is through each human being, through the definition and recognition of and respect for the inalienable rights of individuals and of the communities of peoples.

8. Today, 40 years after the outbreak of the Second World War, I wish to recall the whole of the experiences by individuals and nations that were sustained by a generation that is largely still alive. I had occasion not long ago to reflect again on some of those experiences, in one of the places that are most distressing and overflowing with contempt for man and his fundamental rights — the extermination camp of Oswiecim (Auschwitz), which I visited during my pilgrimage to Poland last June.

THIS INFAMOUS place is unfortunately only one of the many scattered over the continent of Europe. But the memory of even one should be a warning sign on the path of humanity today, in order that every kind of concentration camp anywhere on earth may once and for all be done away with. And everything that recalls those horrible experiences should also disappear forever from the lives of nations and states, everything that is a continuation of those experiences under different forms, namely the various kinds of torture and oppression, either physical or moral, carried out under any system, in any land; this phenomenon is all the more distressing it occurs under the pretext of internal security or the need to preserve an apparent peace.

9. You will forgive me, ladies and gentlemen, for evoking this memory. But I would be untrue to the history of this century, I would be dishonest with regard to the great cause of man, which we all wish to serve, if I should keep silent, I who come from the country on whose living body Oswiecim was at one time constructed. But my purpose in invoking this memory is above all to show what painful experiences and sufferings by millions of people gave rise to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which has been placed as the basic inspiration and cornerstone of the United Nations Organization.

This declaration was paid for by millions of our brothers and sisters at the cost of their suffering and sacrifice, brought about by the brutalization that darkened and made insensitive the human consciences of their oppressors and of those who carried out a real genocide. This price cannot have been paid in vain! The Universal Declaration of Human Rights — with its train of many declarations and conventions on highly important aspects of human rights, in favor of children, of women, of equality between the races, and especially between races, and especially the two international covenants of economic, social and cultural rights and on civil and political rights — must remain the basic value in the United Nations organization with which the consciences of its members must be confronted and from which they must draw continual inspiration.

IF THE truths and principles contained in this document were to be forgotten or ignored and were thus to lose the genuine self-evidence that distinguished them at the time they were brought painfully to birth, then the noble purpose of

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