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Pontiff says that peace flourishes when rights are respected

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — *The following are excerpts from the Vatican text of Pope John Paul II's message for the World Day of Peace, celebrated Jan. 1.*

In my first encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, addressed almost 20 years ago to all men and women of good will, I stressed the importance of respect for human rights. Peace flourishes when these rights are fully respected, but when they are violated what comes is war, which causes other still graver violations. ...

Looking toward the World Day of Peace, let me state the conviction which I very much want to share with you: When the promotion of the dignity of the person is the guiding principle and when the search for the common good is the overriding commitment, then solid and lasting foundations for building peace are laid. But when human rights are ignored or scorned and when the pursuit of individual interests unjustly prevails over the common good, then the seeds of instability, rebellion and violence are inevitably sown. The dignity of the human person is a transcendent value, always recognized as such by those who sincerely search for the truth. ...

The history of our time has shown in a tragic way the danger which results from forgetting the truth about the human person. Before our eyes we have the results of ideologies such as Marxism, Nazism and fascism, and also of myths like racial superiority, nationalism and ethnic exclusivism. No less pernicious, though not always as obvious, are the effects of materialistic consumerism, in which the exaltation of the individual and the selfish satisfaction of personal aspirations become the ultimate goal of life. In this outlook, the negative effects on others are considered completely irrelevant. ...

The year 1998 has marked the 50th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. ... As its fundamental premise, it affirms that the recognition of the innate dignity of all members of the human family, as also the equality and inalienability of their rights, is the founda-

tion of liberty, justice and peace in the world. ...

Defense of the universality and indivisibility of human rights is essential for the construction of a peaceful society and for the overall development of individuals, peoples and nations. ...

I would now like to identify certain specific rights which appear to be particularly exposed to more or less open violation today.

The first of these is the basic right to life. Human life is sacred and inviolable from conception to its natural end. ...

A genuine culture of life, just as it guarantees to the unborn the right to come into the world, in the same way protects the newly born, especially girls, from the crime of infanticide. Equally it assures the handicapped that they can fully develop their capacities and ensures adequate care for the sick and the elderly.

Recent developments in the field of genetic engineering present a profoundly disquieting challenge. In order that scientific research in this area may be at the service of the person, it must be accompanied at every stage by careful ethical reflection. ...

To choose life involves rejecting every form of violence: the violence of poverty and hunger, which afflicts so many human beings; the violence of armed conflict; the violence of criminal trafficking in drugs and arms; the violence of mindless damage to the natural environment. ...

Religion expresses the deepest aspirations of the human person, shapes people's vision of the world and affects their relationships with others: Basically it offers the answer to the question of the true meaning of life, both personal and communal. Religious freedom therefore constitutes the very heart of human rights. ... Recourse to violence in the name of religious belief is a perversion of the very teachings of the major religions. ...

One of the most tragic forms of discrimination is the denial to ethnic groups and national minorities of the fundamental right to exist as such. This is done by



Reuters/CNS

Pope John Paul II blesses pilgrims during his Sunday Angelus in St. Peter's Square Dec. 20.

suppressing them or brutally forcing them to move or by attempting to weaken their ethnic identity to such an extent that they are no longer distinguishable. ... No effort must be judged too great when it is a question of putting an end to such abuses, which are violations of human dignity. ...

Every human being has innate abilities waiting to be developed. At stake here is the full actualization of one's own person and the appropriate insertion into one's social environment. In order that this may take place, it is necessary above all to provide adequate education to those who are just beginning their lives: Their future success depends on this. ...

The effects of the recent economic and financial crises have had heavy consequences for countless people reduced to conditions of extreme poverty. ... We urgently need a new vision of global progress in solidarity which will include an overall and sustainable development of society so as to enable all people to realize their potential.

In this context, I make a pressing appeal to all those with responsibility for financial relations on the worldwide level. I ask them to make a sincere effort to find a solution to the frightening problem of the international debt of the poorest nations. ...

The promotion of human dignity is linked to the right to a healthy environment, since this right highlights the dynamics of the relationship between the individual and society. ... The world's present and future depend on the safeguarding of creation, because of the endless interdependence between human beings and their environment. ...

In a sense, promoting the right to peace ensures respect for all other rights, since it encourages the building of a society in which structures of power give way to structures of cooperation, with a view to the common good. Recent history clearly shows the failure of recourse to violence as a means for resolving political and social problems. War destroys, it does not build up; it weakens the moral foundations of society and creates further divisions and long-lasting tensions. ... Children need peace; they have a right to it. ...

When the violation of any fundamental human right is accepted without reaction, all other rights are placed at risk. It is therefore essential that there should be a global approach to the subject of human rights and a serious commitment to defend them. ... Every violation of human rights carries within it the seeds of possible conflict. ...

The new millennium is close at hand, and its approach has filled the hearts of many with hope for a more just and fraternal world. ... I now address you, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, who in all parts of the world take the Gospel in the pattern of your lives: Become heralds of human dignity! Faith teaches us that every person has been created in the image and likeness of God. ... (We) must recognize Christ in the poorest and the most marginalized, those whom the Eucharist — which is communion in the body and blood of Christ given up for us — commits us to serve. ...

Pope

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"This involves a positive choice, a choice for life," he said. "The development of a culture of this kind embraces all the circumstances of life and ensures the promotion of human dignity in every situation."

A culture committed to the right to life, the pope said, would protect not only the unborn, but also the disabled, the elderly and newborn girls who might be subject to infanticide.

"Recent developments in the field of genetic engineering present a profoundly disquieting challenge," he added. "In order that scientific research in this area may be at the service of the person, it must be accompanied at every stage by careful ethical reflection, which will bring about adequate legal norms safeguarding the integrity of

human life. Life can never be downgraded to the level of a thing."

Religious freedom is another basic human right, the pope said, because it "expresses the deepest aspirations of the human person."

The pope also said using religion to justify violence is "a perversion of the very teachings of the major religions."

Pope John Paul argued that people should be guaranteed the rights to participate in their communities, to vote in fair and open elections, and to be led by uncorrupted officials.

He then turned to what he called "one of the most tragic forms of discrimination," denial of the right of ethnic groups and national minorities to exist, and asked, "Can we remain silent in the face of such grave crimes against humanity?"

Pope John Paul said a global conference held in Rome during the summer to create an international criminal court for cases of

genocide and crimes against humanity was "a positive sign," and added that it "could gradually contribute to ensuring on a world scale the effective protection of human rights."

The pope also named access to adequate education, to work, and to a healthy environment as essential human rights.

"The danger of serious damage to land and sea and to the climate, flora and fauna, calls for a profound change in modern civilization's typical consumer life-style, particularly in the richer countries," Pope John Paul said.

He also said that people living in poverty in rural areas should be taught sustainable farming techniques, so that they are not "driven by necessity to exploit beyond sustainable limits the little land which they have at their disposal."

"We urgently need a new vision of global progress in solidarity, which will include an overall and sustainable development of

society," the pope said.

In addition, Pope John Paul appealed "to all those with responsibility for financial relations on the worldwide level ... to make a sincere effort to find a solution to the frightening problem of the international debt of the poorest nations."

The pope included as a human right the "right to peace," and said war "is the failure of all true humanism." He called for an end to the use of anti-personnel mines, to trafficking in arms destined for countries at war, to the proliferation of small-caliber weapons, and to the use of children as soldiers, adding, "children need peace; they have a right to it."

"When the violation of any fundamental human right is accepted without reaction, all other rights are placed at risk," Pope John Paul said. "It is therefore essential that there should be a global approach to the subject of human rights and a serious commitment to defend them."

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