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Pope says world peace needs to be built day by day

EDITORS' NOTE: Excerpts follow of Pope John Paul II's message for the World Day of Peace on Jan. 1. The message was released at the Vatican Dec. 13 and provided by Catholic News Service.

"Peace on earth to those whom God loves!"

1. This is the proclamation of the angels which greeted the birth of Jesus Christ 2,000 years ago (cf. Lk.2:14) At the dawn of the new millennium, we wish to propose once more the message of hope which comes from the stable of Bethlehem: God loves all men and women on earth and gives them the hope of a new era, an era of peace. His love, fully revealed in the incarnate Son, is the foundation of universal peace.

When welcomed in the depths of the human heart, this love reconciles people with God and with themselves, renews human relationships and stirs that desire for brotherhood capable of banishing the temptation of violence and war. The Great Jubilee is inseparably linked to this message of love and reconciliation, a message which gives voice to the truest aspirations of humanity today.

2. Looking to a year so filled with meaning, I once more offer everyone my good wishes for peace. To everyone I affirm that peace is possible. It needs to be implored from God as his gift, but it also needs to be built day by day with his help, through works of justice and love.

To be sure, the problems which make the path to peace difficult and often discouraging are many and complex, but peace is a need deeply rooted in the heart of every man and woman. The will to seek peace must not therefore be allowed to weaken. This seeking must be based on the awareness that humanity, however much marred by sin, hatred and violence, is called by God to be a single family. This divine plan needs to be recognized and carried out through the search for harmonious relationships between individuals and peoples in a culture where openness to the transcendent, the promotion of the human person and respect for the world of nature are shared by all.

This is the message of Christmas, this is the message of the jubilee, this is my hope at the beginning of a new millennium.

War Is a Defeat for Humanity

3. In the century we are leaving behind, humanity has been sorely tried by an endless and horrifying sequence of wars, conflicts, genocides and "ethnic cleansings" which have caused unspeakable suffering; millions and millions of victims, families and countries destroyed, an ocean of



Reuters/CNS

A Swiss guard stands near a kneeling Pope John Paul II after the pontiff opened the Holy Door to the Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome Jan. 1. The pope in his New Year's Day homily appealed to humanity to make the next 1,000 years a time of peace.

refugees, misery, hunger, disease, underdevelopment and the loss of immense resources. At the root of so much suffering there lies a logic of supremacy fueled by the desire to dominate and exploit others, by ideologies of power or totalitarian utopias, by crazed nationalisms or ancient tribal hatreds.

At times brutal and systematic violence aimed at the very extermination or enslavement of entire peoples and regions has had to be countered by armed resistance.

The 20th century bequeaths to us above all else a warning:

Wars are often the cause of further wars because they fuel deep hatreds, create situations of injustice, and trample upon people's dignity and rights. Wars generally do not resolve the problems for which they are fought, and therefore, in addition to causing horrendous damage, they prove ulti-

mately futile. War is a defeat for humanity. Only in peace and through peace can respect for human dignity and its inalienable rights be guaranteed.

Called to Be One Family

5. "Peace on earth to those whom God loves!" The Gospel greeting prompts a heartfelt question: Will the new century be one of peace and a renewed sense of brotherhood between individuals and peoples? We cannot of course foresee the future. But we can set forth one certain principle: There will be peace only to the extent that humanity as a whole rediscovers its fundamental calling to be one family, a family in which the dignity and rights of individuals — whatever their status, race or religion — are accepted as prior and superior to any kind of difference or distinction.

6. For this to happen, a complete change of perspective will be needed: It is no longer the well-being of any one political, racial or cultural community that must prevail, but rather the good of humanity as a whole. The pursuit of the common good of a single political community cannot be in conflict with the common good of humanity, expressed in the recognition of and respect for human rights sanctioned by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948.

Crimes Against Humanity

7. This principle has an immensely important consequence: An offense against human rights is an offense against the conscience of humanity as such, an offense against humanity itself. The duty of protecting these rights therefore extends beyond the geographical and political borders within which they are violated. Crimes against humanity cannot be considered an internal affair of a nation. Here an important step forward was taken with the establishment of an Interna-

tional Criminal Court to try such crimes, regardless of the place or circumstances in which they are committed. We must thank God that in the conscience of peoples and nations there is a growing conviction that human rights have no borders because they are universal and indivisible.

8. In our time, the number of wars between states has diminished. This fact, albeit consoling, appears in a very different light if we consider the armed conflicts taking place within states. Sadly these are quite numerous on practically every continent and often very violent. For the most part, they are rooted in long-standing historical motives of an ethnic, tribal or even religious character, to which must be added nowadays other ideological, social and economic causes. These internal conflicts, usually waged through the large-scale use of small-caliber weapons and so-called "light" arms — arms which are in fact extraordinarily lethal — often have grave consequences which spill over the borders of the country in question, involving outside interests and responsibilities.

Humanitarian Assistance

9. In every case, in the face of such tragic and complex situations and contrary to all alleged "reasons" of war, there is a need to affirm the pre-eminent value of humanitarian law and the consequent duty to guarantee the right to humanitarian aid to suffering civilians and refugees.

10. Here I wish to restate my conviction that, in the face of modern armed conflicts, negotiation between parties, with appropriate attempts at mediation and pacification by international and regional bodies, is of the greatest importance.

11. Clearly, when a civilian population risks being overcome by the attacks of an unjust aggressor and political efforts and nonviolent defense prove to be of no avail, it is legitimate and even obligatory to take concrete measures to disarm the aggressor. These measures, however, must be limited in time and precise in their aims. They must be carried out in full respect for international law, guaranteed by an authority that is internationally recognized and, in any event, never left to the outcome of armed intervention alone. The fullest and the best use must therefore be made of all the provisions of the U.N. Charter

12. This opens a new field of reflection and discussion both for politics and for law, a field which we all hope will be earnestly and wisely cultivated. What is needed without delay is a renewal of international law and international institutions, a renewal whose starting point and basic organizing principle should be the primacy of the good of humanity and of the human.

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Intervention

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"A state or a group of states cannot on its own decide to intervene," the Jesuit priest said. "States tend to intervene when its in their own interests; thus, there is danger of abuse."

Perhaps because over the past decade the United Nations has shown itself sluggish and inefficient in responding to humanitarian crises, the pope's peace message stresses that the United Nations must further define "effective instruments and modes of intervention within the framework of international law."

The pope also said that the United Nations "must offer all its member states an equal opportunity to be part of the decision-making process, eliminating privileges and discriminations which weaken its role and its credibility."

It would be a mistake to read this as a call for abolishment of the Security Council, the small group of powerful member

nations responsible for rapid response decisions, Father Joblin said.

Nonetheless, he said that it was clear that the Security Council needed reform, particularly because the veto power held by the five permanent members negotiation short.

Though the papal teaching may seem utopian today, Father Joblin said, the pope foresees a time when it will seem commonplace.

An evolution of conscience is already taking place, the priest maintained, pointing out that, 40 years after World War II, a fresh armed conflict in Western Europe is unthinkable.

"The Holy See promotes human rights by provoking reflection in public opinion," he said. "All the newspapers, the magazines, are talking about the pope's message; this contributes to moving public opinion in the direction of a greater solidarity."

"This is the first step — if there isn't a common will, nothing will get done," he said.