

MESSAGE
OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE
WORLD DAY OF PEACE

1 JANUARY 2004

**AN EVER TIMELY COMMITMENT:
TEACHING PEACE**

My words are addressed to you, the Leaders of the nations, who have the duty of promoting peace!

To you, Jurists, committed to tracing paths to peaceful agreement, preparing conventions and treaties which strengthen international legality!

To you, Teachers of the young, who on all continents work tirelessly to form consciences in the ways of understanding and dialogue!

And to you too, men and women tempted to turn to the unacceptable means of terrorism and thus compromise at its root the very cause for which you are fighting!

All of you, hear the humble appeal of the Successor of Peter who cries out: today too, at the beginning of the New Year 2004, *peace remains possible*. And if peace is possible, *it is also a duty!*

A practical initiative

1. My first [Message for the World Day of Peace](#), in the beginning of January 1979, was centred on the theme: *“To Reach Peace, Teach Peace”*.

That New Year's Message followed in the path traced by Pope Paul VI of venerable memory, who had wished to celebrate on January 1 each year a World Day of Prayer for Peace. I recall the words of the late Pontiff for the New Year 1968: “It would be Our desire, then, that this celebration take place each year as a sign of hope and promise, at the beginning of the calendar which measures and guides the journey of human life through time, in order that Peace, with its just and salutary equilibrium, will dominate the unfolding of history yet to come”.⁽¹⁾

Faithful to the wishes expressed by my venerable Predecessor on the Chair of Peter, each year I have continued this noble tradition by dedicating the first day of the civil year to reflection and to prayer for peace in the world.

In the twenty-five years of Pontificate which the Lord has thus far granted me, I have not failed to speak out before the Church and the world, inviting believers and all persons of good will to take up the cause of peace and to help bring about this fundamental good, thereby assuring the world a better future, one marked by peaceful coexistence and mutual respect.

Once more this year I feel bound to invite all men and women, on every continent, to celebrate a new World Day of Peace. Humanity needs now more than ever to rediscover the path of concord, overwhelmed as it is by selfishness and hatred, by the thirst for power and the lust for vengeance.

The science of peace

2. The eleven [Messages addressed to the world by Pope Paul VI](#) progressively mapped out the path to be followed in attaining the ideal of peace. Slowly but surely the great Pontiff set forth the various chapters of a true “science of peace”. It can be helpful to recall the themes of the Messages bequeathed to us by Pope Paul VI for this occasion.⁽²⁾ Each of these Messages continues to be timely today. Indeed, before the tragedy of the wars which at the beginning of the Third Millennium are still causing bloodshed throughout the world, especially in the Middle East, they take on at times the tone of prophetic admonishments.

A primer of peace

3. For my part, throughout these twenty-five years of my Pontificate, I have sought to advance along the path marked out by my venerable Predecessor. At the dawn of each new year I have invited people of good will to reflect, in the light of reason and of faith, on different aspects of an orderly coexistence.

The result has been a synthesis of teaching about peace which is *a kind of primer* on this fundamental theme: a primer easy to understand by those who are well-disposed, but at the same time quite demanding for anyone concerned for the future of humanity.⁽³⁾

The various colours of the prism of peace have now been amply illustrated. What remains now is to work to ensure that the ideal of a peaceful coexistence, with its specific requirements, will become part of the consciousness of individuals and peoples. We Christians see the commitment to educate ourselves and others to peace as something at the very heart of our religion. For Christians, in fact, to proclaim peace is to announce Christ who is “our peace” (*Eph 2:14*); it is to announce his Gospel, which is a “Gospel of peace” (*Eph 6:15*); it is to call all people to the beatitude of being “peacemakers” (cf. *Mt 5:9*).

Teaching peace

4. In my [Message for the World Day of Peace on 1 January 1979](#) I made this appeal: *To Reach Peace, Teach Peace*. Today that appeal is more urgent than ever, because men and women, in the face of the tragedies which continue to afflict humanity, are tempted to yield to fatalism, as if peace were an unattainable ideal.

The Church, on the other hand, has always taught and continues today to teach a very simple axiom: *peace is possible*. Indeed, the Church does not tire of repeating that *peace is a duty*. It must be built on the four pillars indicated by Blessed John XXIII in his Encyclical *Pacem in Terris*: truth, justice, love and freedom. A duty is thus imposed upon all those who love peace: that of *teaching these ideals to new generations*, in order to prepare a better future for all mankind.

Teaching legality

5. In this task of teaching peace, there is a particularly urgent need to lead individuals and peoples to *respect the international order* and to respect the commitments assumed by the Authorities

which legitimately represent them. Peace and international law are closely linked to each another: *law favours peace*.

From the very dawn of civilization, developing human communities sought to establish agreements and pacts which would avoid the arbitrary use of force and enable them to seek a peaceful solution of any controversies which might arise. Alongside the legal systems of the individual peoples there progressively grew up another set of norms which came to be known as *ius gentium* (the law of the nations). With the passage of time, this body of law gradually expanded and was refined in the light of the historical experiences of the different peoples.

This process was greatly accelerated with the birth of modern States. From the sixteenth century on, jurists, philosophers and theologians were engaged in developing the various headings of international law and in grounding it in the fundamental postulates of the natural law. This process led with increasing force to the formulation of *universal principles which are prior to and superior to the internal law of States*, and which take into account the unity and the common vocation of the human family.

Central among all these is surely the principle that *pacta sunt servanda*: accords freely signed must be honoured. This is the pivotal and exceptionless presupposition of every relationship between responsible contracting parties. The violation of this principle necessarily leads to a situation of illegality and consequently to friction and disputes which would not fail to have lasting negative repercussions. It is appropriate to recall this fundamental rule, especially at times when there is a temptation to appeal to the *law of force* rather than to the *force of law*.

One of these moments was surely the drama which humanity experienced during the Second World War: an abyss of violence, destruction and death unlike anything previously known.

Respect for law

6. That war, with the horrors and the appalling violations of human dignity which it occasioned, led to a *profound renewal of the international legal order*. The defence and promotion of peace were set at the centre of a broadly modernized system of norms and institutions. The task of watching over global peace and security and with encouraging the efforts of States to preserve and guarantee these fundamental goods of humanity was entrusted by Governments to an organization established for this purpose – the *United Nations Organization* – with a *Security Council* invested with broad discretionary power. Pivotal to the system was *the prohibition of the use of force*. This prohibition, according to the well-known Chapter VII of the *United Nations Charter*, makes provision for only two exceptions. The first confirms the *natural right to legitimate defence*, to be exercised in specific ways and in the context of the United Nations: and consequently also within the traditional limits of *necessity* and *proportionality*.

The other exception is represented by the *system of collective security*, which gives the Security Council competence and responsibility for the preservation of peace, with power of decision and ample discretion.

The system developed with the *United Nations Charter* was meant “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind”.⁽⁴⁾ In the decades which followed, however, the division of the international community into opposing blocs, the cold war in one part of the world, the outbreak of violent conflicts in other areas and the phenomenon of terrorism produced a growing break with the ideas and expectations of the immediate post-war period.

A new international order

7. It must be acknowledged, however, that the United Nations Organization, even with limitations and delays due in great part to the failures of its members, has made a notable contribution to the promotion of respect for human dignity, the freedom of peoples and the requirements of development, thus preparing the cultural and institutional soil for the building of peace.

The activity of national Governments will be greatly encouraged by the realization that the ideals of the United Nations have become widely diffused, particularly through the practical gestures of solidarity and peace made by the many individuals also involved in *Non-Governmental Organizations* and in *Movements* for human rights.

This represents a significant incentive for a reform which would enable the United Nations Organization to function effectively for the pursuit of its own stated ends, which remain valid: “humanity today is in a new and more difficult phase of its genuine development. It needs a *greater degree of international ordering*”.⁽⁵⁾ States must consider this objective as a clear moral and political obligation which calls for prudence and determination. Here I would repeat the words of encouragement which I spoke in 1995: “The United Nations Organization needs to rise more and more above the cold status of an administrative institution and to become a moral centre where all the nations of the world feel at home and develop a shared awareness of being, as it were, a *family of nations*”.⁽⁶⁾

The deadly scourge of terrorism

8. Today international law is hard pressed to provide solutions to situations of conflict arising from the changed landscape of the contemporary world. These situations of conflict frequently involve *agents which are not themselves States* but rather entities derived from the collapse of States, or connected to independence movements, or linked to trained criminal organizations. A legal system made up of norms established down the centuries *as a means of disciplining relations between sovereign States* finds it difficult to deal with conflicts which also involve *entities incapable of being considered States in the traditional sense*. This is particularly the case with terrorist groups.

The scourge of terrorism has become more virulent in recent years and has produced brutal massacres which have in turn put even greater obstacles in the way of dialogue and negotiation, increasing tensions and aggravating problems, especially in the Middle East.

Even so, if it is to be won, *the fight against terrorism cannot be limited solely to repressive and punitive operations*. It is essential that the use of force, even when necessary, be accompanied by a courageous and lucid analysis of the *reasons behind terrorist attacks*. The fight against terrorism must be conducted also on the *political and educational* levels: on the one hand, by eliminating the underlying causes of situations of injustice which frequently drive people to more desperate and violent acts; and on the other hand, by insisting on an education inspired by respect for human life in every situation: the unity of the human race is a more powerful reality than any contingent divisions separating individuals and people.

In the necessary fight against terrorism, international law is now called to develop legal instruments provided with effective means for the prevention, monitoring and suppression of crime. In any event, democratic governments know well that the use of force against terrorists *cannot justify a renunciation of the principles of the rule of law*. Political decisions would be unacceptable were they to seek success without consideration for fundamental human rights, since *the end never justifies the means*.

The contribution of the Church

9. “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (*Mt 5:9*). How could this saying, which is a summons to work in the immense field of peace, find such a powerful echo in the human heart if it did not correspond to an irrepressible yearning and hope dwelling within us? And why else would peacemakers be called children of God, if not because God is by nature the God of peace? Precisely for this reason, in the message of salvation which the Church proclaims throughout the world, there are doctrinal elements of fundamental importance for the development of the principles needed for peaceful coexistence between nations.

History teaches that the building of peace cannot prescind from respect for an ethical and juridical order, in accordance with the ancient adage: “*Serva ordinem et ordo servabit te*” (preserve order and order will preserve you). International law must ensure that the law of the more powerful does not prevail. Its essential purpose is to replace “the material force of arms with the moral force of law”,⁽⁷⁾ providing appropriate sanctions for transgressors and adequate reparation for victims. This must also be applicable to those government leaders who violate with impunity human dignity and rights while hiding behind the unacceptable pretext that it is a matter of questions internal to their State.

In an [Address which I gave to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See on 13 January 1997](#), I observed that *international law* is a primary means for pursuing peace: “For a long time international law has been a law of war and peace. I believe that it is called more and more to become exclusively a law of peace, conceived in justice and solidarity. And in this context *morality must inspire law*; morality can even assume a preparatory role in the making of law, to the extent that it shows the path of what is right and good”.⁽⁸⁾

Down the centuries, the teaching of the Church, drawing upon the philosophical and theological reflection of many Christian thinkers, has made a significant contribution in directing international law to the common good of the whole human family. Especially in more recent times the Popes have not hesitated to stress the importance of international law as a pledge of peace, in the conviction that “the harvest of justice is sown in peace by those who make peace” (*Jas 3:18*). This is the path which the Church, employing the means proper to her, is committed to following, in the perennial light of the Gospel and with the indispensable help of prayer.

The civilization of love

10. At the conclusion of these considerations, I feel it necessary to repeat that, for the establishment of true peace in the world, *justice must find its fulfilment in charity*. Certainly law is the first road leading to peace, and people need to be taught to respect that law. Yet one does not arrive at the end of this road unless justice is complemented by love. Justice and love sometimes appear to be *opposing forces*. In fact they are but *two faces of a single reality*, two dimensions of human life needing to be mutually integrated. Historical experience shows this to be true. It shows how justice is frequently unable to free itself from rancour, hatred and even cruelty. *By itself, justice is not enough*. Indeed, it can even betray itself, unless it is open to that deeper power which is love.

For this reason I have often reminded Christians and all persons of good will that *forgiveness is needed* for solving the problems of individuals and peoples. *There is no peace without forgiveness!* I say it again here, as my thoughts turn in particular to the continuing crisis in Palestine and the Middle East: a solution to the grave problems which for too long have caused suffering for the peoples of those regions will not be found until a decision is made to transcend the logic of simple *justice* and to be open also to the logic of *forgiveness*.

Christians know that love is the reason for God's entering into relationship with man. And it is love which he awaits as man's response. Consequently, love is also *the loftiest and most noble form of relationship* possible between human beings. Love must thus enliven every sector of human life and extend to the international order. Only a humanity in which there reigns the "civilization of love" will be able to enjoy authentic and lasting peace.

At the beginning of a New Year I wish to repeat to women and men of every language, religion and culture the ancient maxim: "*Omnia vincit amor*" (Love conquers all). Yes, dear Brothers and Sisters throughout the world, in the end love will be victorious! Let everyone be committed to hastening this victory. For it is the deepest hope of every human heart.

From the Vatican, 8 December 2003.

JOHN PAUL II

NOTES

(1) *Insegnamenti*, V (1967), 620.

(2) 1968: *1 January: World Day of Peace*
1969: *The Promotion of Human Rights, the Road to Peace*
1970: *Education for Peace Through Reconciliation*
1971: *Every Man is My Brother*
1972: *If You Want Peace, Work for Justice*
1973: *Peace is Possible*
1974: *Peace Depends on You Too*
1975: *Reconciliation, The Way to Peace*
1976: *The Real Weapons of Peace*
1977: *If You Want Peace, Defend Life*
1978: *No to Violence, Yes to Peace*

(3) These are the themes of the successive twenty-five World Days of Peace:

1979: *To Reach Peace, Teach Peace*
1980: *Truth, the Power of Peace*
1981: *To Serve Peace, Respect Freedom*
1982: *Peace: A Gift of God Entrusted to Us!*
1983: *Dialogue for Peace, A Challenge for Our Time*
1984: *From a New Heart, Peace is Born*
1985: *Peace and Youth Go Forward Together*
1986: *Peace is a Value with No Frontiers North-South, East-West: Only One Peace*
1987: *Development and Solidarity: Two Keys to Peace*
1988: *Religious Freedom, Condition for Peace*
1989: *To Build Peace, Respect Minorities*
1990: *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation*
1991: *If You Want Peace, Respect the Conscience of Every Person*
1992: *Believers United in Building Peace*
1993: *If You Want Peace, Reach Out to the Poor*

1994: *The Family Creates the Peace of the Human Family*
1995: *Women: Teachers of Peace*
1996: *Let Us Give Children a Future of Peace*
1997: *Offer Forgiveness and Receive Peace*
1998: *From the Justice of Each Comes Peace for All*
1999: *Respect for Human Rights: The Secret of True Peace*
2000: "Peace on Earth to Those Whom God Loves!"
2001: *Dialogue Between Cultures for a Civilization of Love and Peace*
2002: *No Peace Without Justice, No Justice Without Peace*
2003: "Pacem in Terris": *A Permanent Commitment*

(4) *Preamble.*

(5) JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 43: AAS 80 (1988), 575.

(6) *Address to the Fiftieth General Assembly of the United Nations*, New York (5 October 1995), 14: *Insegnamenti*, XVIII/2 (1995), 741.

(7) BENEDICT XV, *Appeal to the Leaders of the Warring Nations*, 1 August 1917: AAS 9 (1917), 422.

(8) No. 4: *Insegnamenti*, XX/1 (1997), 97.