



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II  
TO MEMBERS OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE OF THE  
UNITED NATIONS ORGANIZATION AGAINST APARTHEID\***

*Saturday, 7 July 1984*

*Mr Chairman,*

*Dear Friends,*

1. I have accepted very willingly your request to be received in audience, for I have seen in it a sign of your appreciation of what the Catholic Church is doing to *defend the dignity of the human person*, and in particular to combat all forms of racial discrimination.

Your Committee is no stranger to this place, and it is familiar with the often reaffirmed teaching of the Church and the position of the Holy See on racial discrimination and *apartheid*.

Ten years ago, on 22 May 1974, my predecessor Paul VI received your Committee and indicated the bases of the Christian commitment to the cause of promoting human dignity. Today's meeting gives me an opportunity to emphasize once more the principles governing this commitment. Man's *creation by God* "in his own image" (*Gen. 1, 27*) confers upon every human person an eminent dignity; it also postulates *the fundamental equality of all human beings*. For the Church, this equality, which is rooted in man's being, acquires the dimension of an altogether special brotherhood through the Incarnation of the Son of God, whose sacrifice redeemed all people. In *the Redemption* effected by Jesus Christ the Church sees a further basis of the rights and duties of the human person. Hence every form of discrimination based on race, whether occasional or systematically practised, and whether it is aimed at individuals or whole racial groups, is absolutely unacceptable. The Apostle Saint Paul says very clearly: "Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man but Christ is all, and in all" (*Col. 3, 11*).

2. Unfortunately, as I had to note on the occasion of the celebration of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination: ". . . the scourge of racial discrimination, in all its many forms, still disfigures our age. It denies the fundamental equality of all men and women, proclaimed by the different Declarations of the United Nations, but above all

rooted in God" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II, *Nuntius ob diei universalis celebrationem ad generis discriminationem eripiendam datus*, die 21 mar. 1984: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, VII, 1 (1984) 729).

I would also like to recall the fact that Paul VI, in his last address to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, spoke about the racial conflict in Africa and mentioned "the attempt to create juridical and political structures in violation of the principles of universal suffrage and the self-determination of peoples" (Pauli VI, *Allocutio ad Excellentissimos Viros, qui apud Sanctam Sedem Legatorum munere funguntur habita*, II, die 14 ian. 1978: *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, XVI (1978) 30s).

The Holy See is following with close attention the *development of the situation in Southern Africa*, and has repeatedly shown its concern that rights of the individuals and peoples living there be respected.

3. In this context, I would like to make reference to two particular aspects of the problem that exists in that part of the world. It is a question of two aspects that raise questions which are complex, serious and difficult, but which are fundamental for the future of the region and for the well-being of the people living there. I am speaking of the problem of *the independence of Namibia*, which I referred to in my address to the Diplomatic Corps on 14 January last, and the problem of *the forced displacement of vast numbers of people in South Africa*.

My reason for mentioning these two issues today is not that the Holy See wishes to put forward proposals of a political nature.

The Holy See is not unaware of the numerous political implications surrounding these issues, but its interest is on another level: *the level of the human person*. And it is at this level that these matters cause deep disquiet, for the weight of suffering affecting the individuals and communities concerned is very heavy. The Catholic Church, faithful to her mission in the world, shares these sufferings and cannot pass them over in silence, for if she did, her witness of love and service to man would be compromised. The Good News which she received from her divine Founder obliges the Church to proclaim the message of salvation and human dignity and to condemn injustices and attacks on human dignity.

As for Namibia, the Holy See expresses the hope that it will be possible for the negotiations, which have been going on for a long time, to be translated, without too much delay, into clear decisions which will recognize without ambiguity *the right of this nation* to be sovereign and independent. This will be an important contribution towards restoring peace in the region, and a valuable sign of reconciliation between the different peoples that live there. It will similarly be an exemplary application of the principles of international law which cannot fail to extend its positive influence to other conflicts on the African continent and also elsewhere.

The recent agreements which have marked relations between different countries in Southern Africa seem to constitute an advance in this direction. In the meantime, it is of capital importance that the conduct of the civil and military authorities in Namibian territory should be inspired by *respect for the rights of the inhabitants*, even in the situations of confrontation that may exist.

Concerning the second issue that I have mentioned, namely the displacement of vast numbers of South African citizens

to the places of residence assigned to them by the Government, *the local Catholic Church has already expressed its protest*, since this procedure represents a grave violation of the rights of the human person, and at the same time is deeply damaging to family life and the social fabric.

*A joint ecumenical initiative* has been taken by the Southern Africa Catholic Bishops' Conference and the South African Council of Churches, in order to draw the attention of the public and of international organizations to these facts, which are a *consequence of the system of apartheid*. The Holy See, for its part, expresses its concern at procedures contrary to the dignity of individuals and whole communities. It earnestly hopes that a different policy will be established, in order that a population already so sorely tried and whose right to be treated without discrimination is systematically flouted may be spared further painful and tragic experiences. It likewise desires the revision of such a policy so that other catastrophic consequences can be avoided in the future, for the true good of all who live in the region and for the sake of world peace.

4. My dear friends: your delicate work demands *firmness in the defence of principles* and *prudence in the choice of means* suitable for attaining your purpose. I assure you that the Church, keeping in mind her own level of responsibilities and competencies, is at your side as you travel your difficult road, and she is ready *to support every effort aimed at removing the temptation to violence* and at helping to solve the problem of apartheid in *a spirit of dialogue and fraternal love* that respects the rights of the parties involved.

May Almighty God inspire good will in all people concerned, and help those in positions of responsibility to make wise decisions, so that in that region of the world justice and peace may prevail. What is at stake is the dignity of *the human person and the well-being of all mankind*.

\**Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. VII, 2 p. 36-39.

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*Paths to Peace* p. 109-111.

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