



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY

OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

TO SARAJEVO (APRIL 12-13, 1997)

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
TO THE POLITICAL LEADERS
OF BOSNIA-HERCEGOVINA***

13 April 1997

Members of the Presidency of Bosnia-Herzegovina,¹ I heartily thank Your Excellencies for the kind welcome and cordial words which the President of the Presidency has extended to me in the name of all of you. I offer to you and your families my respectful greeting, which I willingly extend to the Authorities present and to all who, in various ways, have civil and military responsibilities in the day-to-day work of strengthening peace and civil harmony in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In this region for many centuries East and West have met and not infrequently come into conflict. For a long time there has been the experience of the coexistence of different cultures which, each in its own way, has enriched the region with its values. In Bosnia-Herzegovina there live side by side the South Slavs, united in common ancestry though divided by history. In this capital city, for example, there rise the Catholic cathedral, the Orthodox cathedral, the Muslim mosque and the Jewish synagogue. These four edifices are not only the places where believers in the one God profess their faith; they are also a visible sign of the kind of civil society which the people of this region wish to build: a society of peace, the members of which acknowledge God as the one Lord and Father of all. The tensions which can develop between individuals and ethnic groups as an inheritance from the past and as a consequence of close proximity and diversity ought to find in religious values reasons for moderation and restraint, indeed for understanding, with a view to constructive cooperation.² I have had occasion to affirm - and I say it again here today - that Sarajevo, a city at the crossroads of the tensions between cultures, religions, and different peoples, can be considered the city symbolizing our century. Precisely here the First World War began in 1914; here the violence of the Second World War was unleashed in all its fury; here, finally, in the closing decade of the century, its people have experienced, amidst destruction and death, interminable years of fear and anguish. Now, after so much suffering, Bosnia-Herzegovina is finally committed to building peace. This is not an easy undertaking, as the experience of the months since the end of the conflict have shown. Nevertheless, with the help of the International Community, peace is possible, indeed peace is necessary. From a historical perspective, Sarajevo and the whole of Bosnia-Herzegovina, if they succeed in setting up their institutional

structure in peace, can become at the end of this century an example of coexistence in diversity for many nations experiencing this same difficulty, in Europe and elsewhere in the world.³ The method which must be rigorously followed in solving the problems which arise along the arduous path is the method of dialogue, inspired by listening to the other side and mutual respect. The method which, despite cases of resistance, is being increasingly acknowledged, requires of those taking part, frankness, courage, patience and perseverance. The effort required by face-to-face encounter will be richly rewarded. It will slowly become possible for the wounds inflicted by the recent terrible war to heal and real hope for a more worthy future for all the peoples who together live in this territory will become possible. Dialogue must be conducted with respect for equality of rights, guaranteed to individual citizens by appropriate legal means, without preference or discrimination. An urgent effort must be made to ensure that everyone can be guaranteed work, which is the basis of recovery and development, while respecting human dignity. An effort must be made to ensure that the exiles and refugees, in whatever part of Bosnia-Herzegovina, can exercise the right to recover the homes which they had to abandon in the turmoil of the conflict. Equality of rights must be granted to the ethnic-religious communities. Bosnia-Herzegovina is a mosaic of cultures, religions and ethnic groups which, if recognized and safeguarded in their diversity, can contribute their respective gifts to the enrichment of the one patrimony of civil society.⁴ Building a true and lasting peace is a great task entrusted to everyone. Certainly, much depends on those who have public responsibilities. But the future of peace, while largely entrusted to institutional formulations, which have to be effectively drawn up by means of sincere dialogue and in respect for justice, depend no less decisively on a renewed solidarity of minds and hearts. It is this interior attitude which must be fostered, both within the frontiers of Bosnia-Herzegovina and also in relations with neighbouring States and the Community of Nations. But an attitude of this kind can only be established on the foundation of forgiveness. For the edifice of peace to be solid, against the background of so much blood and hatred, it will have to be built on the courage of forgiveness. People must know how to ask for forgiveness and to forgive! Members of the Presidency, in entrusting to you these considerations, I also wish to entrust them to the other leaders of every rank and competency in order that hope for a steady strengthening of the peace so arduously achieved may be fostered, and an ever more peaceful and prosperous future for every inhabitant of this beloved Bosnia-Herzegovina may be assured. Despite the difficulties, obstacles and hindrances, let hope never fail! God does not abandon peacemakers. I implore him, the almighty Lord of the universe, to grant everyone his consolation, and to strengthen in people's hearts generous resolutions of sincere dialogue, true understanding, and mutual commitment to reconstruction and

peace.

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