



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER PAUL VI
TO THE TEHERAN CONFERENCE
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 20th ANNIVERSARY OF THE DECLARATION OF HUMAN
RIGHTS***

We have learned with keen satisfaction that the United Nations Organization, wishing to commemorate fittingly the twentieth anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights, has decided to hold an international conference for this purpose. Gladly responding to the invitation that you have given us, we have appointed a delegation to represent us, headed by our dear son, Theodore Hesburgh, President of the University of Notre Dame.

If the Declaration of Human Rights proved capable of stirring up controversy and becoming the object of justifiable objections, as Pope John XXIII saw it, there is no doubt, nevertheless, that it marked an important step towards the establishment of a juridico-political organization of the world community, as that unforgettable Pontiff equally emphasized, noting that it recognizes the dignity of all human persons without exception and affirms the right of each individual freely to seek the truth, to follow the norms of morality, to practice the duties of justice, to demand living conditions in conformity with human dignity and to exercise those other human rights that are inseparable from these.

Our venerated Predecessor in his encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, a veritable and well remembered spiritual testament, could legitimately speak of the declaration as one of the «signs of the times.» (N. 143) He immediately and realistically added, «May the day come as quickly as possible when every human being will find therein an effective safeguard for the rights which derive directly from his dignity as a person and which are therefore universal, inviolable and inalienable rights.» (*Pacem in Terris*, N. 145)

We ourself, at the time when the Vatican Council was meeting in Rome, had the honor of making

this United Nations program our own at the very rostrum of the Organization: «... the ideal which humanity dreams about during its pilgrimage through time ... the greatest hope of the world ... the basic rights and duties of man, his dignity, his liberty and above all, his religious liberty.»

The Church, which shares the hope, the grief and the anguish of people of our time, firmly insists that «forms of social or cultural discrimination in basic personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, colour, social conditions, language or religion must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God's design.» (*Gaudium et Spes*, N. 29).

Who does not see how vast is the distance to be covered before these declarations of intent are put into effect, before constant and numerous violations of principles rightly called «universal, inviolable, and inalienable» are eliminated? We ourselves have judged it our duty, a fulfilment of the responsibility entrusted to us, to echo, in our encyclical on the development of peoples, the legitimate aspirations of the people of our day, not hesitating to call action for the realization of that end «a ferment of the Gospel in the human heart.» (*Populorum Progressio*, N. 32)

Together with all people of good will, we will be following with great interest the conference in Teheran, which plans to formulate a program of measures to be taken to extend the year of human rights. Racial discrimination brings on so many troubles - social injustice, economic misery, and ideological oppression as well as revolutions, because the temptation is great to respond with violence to such wrongs to human dignity. It has to be said, nevertheless, that «a real evil should not be fought against at the cost of greater misery.» (*Populorum Progressio* N. 30, N. 31) May all people of good will band together not only to proclaim the principles of the United Nations but to put them into effect and may States not only promulgate them in their constitutions but have public authorities put them into operation so that every person can live a life worthy of the same.

The extent and urgency of the action needed demands that all of us cooperate with one another. What means can we find to make international resolutions effective among the world's peoples? How are we to insure that basic human rights are observed when they are being flouted? In a word, how are we to intervene to save the human person, threatened everywhere? How do we make leaders aware that the essential patrimony of humanity is at stake and that it cannot be attacked with impunity without attaining what is most sacred in the human being and without, by so doing, undermining the very foundations of life in society? These are all grave problems that cannot be ignored; it would be vain to proclaim human rights if, at the same time, everything were not done to ensure the duty of respecting them, respect by all, in all places and for all.

To speak of human rights means asserting a common good for all human beings, entails working to build a fraternal community, includes striving to establish a world «where each one is loved and helped as a neighbour, a brother.» (*Populorum Progressio*, N. 82) The golden rule reads «So always treat others as you would like them to treat you...» (Matt. 7:12) In fidelity to this teaching of her divine Founder, the Church reaffirms it during this year of human rights, desiring to cooperate

with all people of good will to build «a world where every person no matter of what race, religion, or nationality can live a fully human life... where freedom is not an empty word...» (*Populorum Progressio*, N. 47)

As we said yesterday in our Easter message, this peaceful enterprise of affirming human rights in the clearest, most authoritative and most effective way deserves to be emulated by all people of good will. The Teheran Conference is, no doubt, making its felicitous contribution to this end. We ourselves rejoice that it is taking place among a people zealously pursuing the elimination of illiteracy and the elevation of women to their rightful place in society. With a full heart, we call down upon all the participants, as well as upon their noble hosts, the abundant blessings of the Almighty.

From the Vatican, 15 April 1968.

PAUL PP. VI

*ORa n.5 p.4.

Paths to Peace p.76-77.

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