

## THEMATIC PRIORITIES OF THE HOLY SEE'S INTERVENTIONS AT THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

*Address to participants at the 2016 International Conference of the Centesimus  
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Distinguished guests,  
Dear Friends,

It's a pleasure to be with you this morning and to have the opportunity to discuss the *principal themes that mark the interventions of the Holy See at the various international and multilateral fora*. In doing so, I hope not only to offer you a vision of the relations between the Holy See and the Community of Nations, but above all, to invite you to consider some of the concerns that move Pope Francis and to consider ways in which *you might make these concerns your own* and, within your own spheres, support the action of the Holy See.

First of all, we should clarify precisely what is meant by the "Holy See". In the strict sense, the Holy See (or Apostolic See) refers to the See of St Peter and thus to the Pope, as St Peter's successor in that See. In its broader canonical sense, the Holy See refers to the Pope and the Roman Curia, as the central organ of governance of the Catholic Church (cfr. Can. 361). Furthermore, at the level of international relations, the Holy See is considered, and has been for centuries, a sovereign juridical subject, independent from every other government or state. The Holy See is also the most ancient institution operating on the international scene, already in existence and active many centuries before the creation of modern states and still today universally recognised as a member of the international community; enjoying the proper prerogatives of a state, to establish diplomatic relations and to enter into international treaties.

The Holy See then should not be confused with the small territory we call the Vatican City State, which is another international subject, distinct from it and created, indeed, with the scope of assuring the liberty, independence and autonomy of the Holy See. Nor can the Holy See be identified, *sic et simpliciter*, with the Catholic Church, which is the community of believers in Jesus Christ, united by bonds of faith and charity with one another, with their respective bishops and with the Bishop of Rome.

Given this particular nature, the international action of the Holy See has the principal scope of assuring the liberty of the Catholic Church and of her pastors, so that they may carry out, for their part, the mission of evangelization entrusted to them by the Lord Jesus (Mt 28:19-20). In addition to this, the Holy See itself, in the various contexts in which it operates, is committed to propagating that ethical guidance and those moral values, coming from the Gospels and proposed by Christian faith and morality.

The entire action of the Holy See, fundamentally, is at the service not only of the Church, but also of man himself, placed by God at the pinnacle of creation, with a dignity that is inseparable from his transcendent dimension. In this perspective, the Holy See acts firstly on the anthropological plane, which is built on this transcendent (or religious) dimension of human life and which is antecedent to state institutions, in the sense that its vindication does not depend on the recognition of the State and does not depend on the judgement of any legislator. The same transcendent dimension, however, needs definition and historical form, in order to give it a concrete expression: and it is at this level that the Holy See acts, with a commitment to address a fundamental message to all States, in order that integral respect for human dignity become the fundamental norm of the international order and of every civil system; so that respect for human dignity may become the yardstick for the legitimacy of all other rules of behaviour. For this reason, in all its bilateral and multilateral relations, the Holy See insists on the primacy of certain principles, without which there cannot be a true civilisation.

Among such principles are found: the right to life at every stage of its biological development, from conception to natural death; the right to form and maintain a family; the right to educated one's children; the right to work and the right to receive a fair distribution of its fruits; the right to a collective and individual economic development; the right to freedom of thought; the right to freedom of conscience and of religion; the right to responsible participation in public life and to contribute to the common good; the right of access to justice and fair process, etc.

Another field of the Holy See's activity, apart from the anthropological, is the political-international. Always guided by its spiritual mission, in this field the Holy See works for the creation of an international order based on justice that allows and assists States to assure their citizens equality of access to the fundamental goods of material life (food, housing, work, etc), of the intellectual life (such as education and culture) and also those that concern the spiritual life (freedom of religion and of worship, in all their dimensions).

In the years immediately following the Second World War (1945-1950), the family of nations established an multilateral structure of coordination and common management of international affairs, with the aim of banishing war and promoting economic and social development in every country: the United Nations Organisation and the various organisms, agencies and programmes associated with it. That international structure was not ignored by successive Popes, who on five occasions have travelled to the UN Headquarters – Paul VI in 1965, John Paul II in 1979 and 1995, Benedict XVI in 2008 and Francis last September. *“All of them expressed their great esteem for the Organisation, which they considered the appropriate juridical and political response to the present moment in history, marked by our technical ability to overcome distances and frontiers and, apparently, to overcome all the natural limits to the exercise of power. An essential response from the moment in which technological power, in the hands of nationalistic or falsely universalist ideologies, is capable of perpetrating tremendous atrocities”*.

This is a quotation from the address of Pope Francis during his visit to the UN General Assembly. In the same discourse he remarked that: *“war is the negation of every right and a dramatic assault on the environment. If we want true integral human development for all, we must work tirelessly to avoid war among nations and peoples.”* Thus, peace among peoples continues to be at the centre of the international activity of the Holy See. The significant proposals for international peace during 2015, the notable scientific and technological progress of recent years (a large part of which is thanks to the activity of private enterprises), the emergence of a vast global middle class and the release of billions of men and women from the trap of poverty: all of these gains can be undermined and indeed overturned by the grave conflicts ongoing in our world, as well as by the persistent exclusion suffered by billions of human beings today.

As you know, we still live with the terrible reality of dozens of open conflicts in various regions of the world; in addition, there is the persistence of many residual situations of conflict that have been only partially resolved and that continue to cause death, destruction and suffering; finally, situations of grave instability continue, in which war could once again break out. To the conflicts among nations and to the long-running civil conflicts, one must add newly developed non-state conflicts, in the form of supranational terrorist organisations and international criminal organisations, including those dedicated to drug trafficking and to human trafficking, with no regard to the moral law, which are causing so much harm to millions of victims.

More specifically, the Holy See has never failed to manifest to Governments and to International Organisations the profound sorrow and concern of the Catholic Church for the difficulties of Central Africa, the Great Lakes' region, South Sudan, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and the many other situations of conflict and violence, many of them caused by criminal interests, which, nonetheless, lead to the loss of millions of human lives, to the gravest physical and psychological consequences among the survivors, especially among the weakest and the most defenceless, and to the destruction of cities and of precious infrastructure. In these contexts, the Holy See has used – and continues to use – all its diplomatic resources to contain the conflicts and to favour processes of reconciliation between governments and between peoples. The humanitarian organisms linked to the Holy See, such as *Caritas Internationalis* and the International Catholic Commission for Migrants, individual national Caritas organisations – both of developed and the developing countries –, as well as the regional and national Episcopal Conferences, engage generously to assist the victims of conflicts, to assist migrants and refugees, and all those affected by violence. They also supports efforts at reconciliation.

There are then certain particular situations of conflict, among which those of the Middle East stand out. This region, which historically has had a decisive role in the birth and growth of our contemporary civilisation, finds itself immersed in a drama that draws together every form of conflict and every type of subject: state and non-state actors, cultural and ethnic groups, as well as groups devoted to fundamentalist violence, conventional arms and arms of mass destruction, terrorism and criminal behaviour, and the involvement, at times ill-considered, of States from outside the region.

The destruction, the pain, the suffering, the hatred, the atrocities and the unprecedented violations of human rights that characterise these conflicts are broadcast by the media in real time (*cfr.* Pope Francis, Discourse to the participants of a meeting promoted by the Pontifical Council «Cor Unum», 17 September 2015), with the risk of generating, by this repeated exposure, a paralysing familiarization and indifference. Such realities, however, should shake the consciences of the entire international community and of all men and women, forcing a renewal and a reinvigoration of the juridical structures and of the existing politics, which must reshape themselves and move decisively to help, with a generous spirit, to limit and to heal, in so far as it is possible, the effects of the present armed crises. Also the business community should feel itself challenged by this reality, which in some way can have consequences for companies, for business leaders, for their workers and for their families. Furthermore, business leaders can – and in certain circumstances, should – bring to bear their own moral influence to help political leaders to reflect and to move public opinion to consider more carefully those proposals for peace and solidarity tirelessly promoted by the Holy See.

Together with these conflicts, and often as a result of them, we are witnessing today the exile of entire populations, a displacement which has now surpassed that caused by the Second World War! Populations and entire regions are being displaced, trying to flee from war, from persecution, from exploitation and poverty. This mass migration has recently moved to the centre of political attention, more, however, because of the additional and unexpected inconveniences placed on the receiving countries, than for the scale of the human tragedy, seen in the price paid by thousands of innocent victims.

The response to such mass displacement – owing also to concerns about terrorism and other local difficulties – especially in the most developed nations, has been a policy of refusal, exemplified, in some cases, by the construction of walls and barriers along national borders. It is a tragic phenomenon, which we thought had been left definitely behind by the events of the 1980s and 1990s. It represents an improvised and ineffective security solution that hides a painful attitude of withdrawal and indifference. In opposition to this tendency, however, many organisations together with hundred of thousands of volunteers, coordinated or spontaneous, continue to mobilise in order to welcome our brothers and sisters, who have been forced to migrate or to flee. This is another

area in which you, as business leaders, can help to sensitize the political class and public opinion.

The Holy See will continue to encourage Governments to overcome every form of narrow nationalism and, above all, to recognise the unity of the human race, trusting in the potential of man, when his dignity is respected and when he is treated as an equal subject, who can contribute to the State and to the progress of society. Both recent and ancient history teach us that migrants, also in the most dramatic of upheavals, have always been a positive contribution to the host country. But, more importantly, migrants are men and women, who enjoy the same universal rights, above all the right to life and to dignity. It is the task of all civil societies, including the commercial sector of those societies, to accompany this action and to engage actively in welcoming and integrating migrants and refugees.

As well as welcoming the displaced, the present situation requires an urgent commitment to resolving the issues that force populations to flee or that compel people to emigrate. The current crisis must become an opportunity to rethink and to change many political and economic decisions, and to discuss, in both public and private, the most important questions concerning peace, security, the conditions for legitimate defence and, in particular, cooperation in favour of development.

This consideration introduces the third and final general perspective which directs the action of the Holy See, and which might be defined as the ecological perspective, in both its environmental and social aspects, in the fullest sense of these terms, bearing in mind that *“a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor”* (Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’* 49).

In this perspective, the Holy See has encouraged the solemn commitment undertaken by the governments of the world to implement the United Nations’ *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*; a timely commitment, that needs to be carried forward with courage, conscious at the same time, that without peace among the nations, it will be impossible to reach the objectives of progress and development.

Pope Francis has also explicitly shown his appreciation for the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, which defines itself as a Plan of Action for the prosperity of peoples and of the planet, and which also strengthens peace in the enjoyment of a broad liberty. The representatives of many governments have recognised that the eradication of poverty, in all its forms and dimensions, constitutes the greatest global challenge and that it is an indispensable requisite for sustainable development. To that end, they have promised to undertake the necessary courageous and transformative steps to attain and maintain a more just and stable world economic structure, one that is ecologically sustainable and capable of keeping pace with demographic growth and social changes.

The Holy See has participated actively in the drafting process of the Agenda and, already before the end of the negotiations, the Holy Father affirmed that the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development represents a sign of hope for the whole of humanity. Equally, the Holy See participated in the negotiations for the binding *Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change* (UNFCCC) and at the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (Addis Abeba, July 2015), during which an ambitious Plan of Action was adopted, which is a necessary instrument for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. On another level, the Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* offers to all Christians, and to people of good will, ethical and religious guidelines that correspond to the abovementioned international commitments.

Your own Foundation, in particular, and indeed all Christian businessmen, on the basis of *Laudato Si'* and the international documents we mentioned, can find inspiration for developing commercial behaviour and actions that will have a positive impact on the common good, on the protection of the environment and on the welfare of families.

Unfortunately, the praiseworthy international proposals in favour of the environment and of human and economic development, and also the new impulse that the Pope's teaching gives to business people and to other economic actors, risk being undermined by war and the consequent humanitarian crises that worsen the already gravely disadvantageous situation of the environment and of various populations, caused by poverty and an irresponsible exploitation of natural resources.

The three perspectives that I have briefly traced, (the anthropological, the political-international and the ecological, in broad terms) allow us to recognise how the Holy See assumes a role on the international scene, that might be considered prophetic, recalling to everyone's attention: the fundamental and overriding dignity of every human being, the necessity of bringing about an international order founded on harmony and peace – thus rejecting violence as a means of resolving conflict – and the necessity of constructing a process of truly sustainable development, both for the good of the earth and for that of the human family, in its entirety. To do this, we cannot simply protect our own interests, disguising them as rights, while ignoring the obligation to respect the rights of others. It needs to be remembered that no nation can guarantee its own security and its own economic and social well-being by isolating itself from the rest of the world and without showing solidarity with other countries. The Holy See's position is also a call to responsibility by everyone, especially by those who occupy leading roles in civil society and in the direction of economic activity.

During his address to the United Nations General Assembly, Pope Francis made his own the words of Paul VI, spoken fifty years earlier, but still valid today for political activity and for economic and business activity: *“The hour has come when a pause, a moment of recollection, reflection, even of prayer, is absolutely needed so that we may think back over our common origin, our history, our common destiny. The appeal to the moral conscience of man has never been as necessary as it is today... For the danger comes neither from progress nor from science; if these are used well, they can help solve a great number of serious problems besetting mankind”* (Paul VI, Address to the Representative of the States, 4 October 1965). Pope Francis affirms that *“human genius, well applied, will surely help to meet the grave challenges of ecological deterioration and of exclusion.”*

This applies particularly to you, business leaders and professionals. However, Paul VI cautions us: *“The real danger comes from man, who has at his disposal ever more powerful instruments that are as well fitted to bring about ruin as they are to achieve lofty conquests!”* (ibid).

Civil society and the business world can make their own and implement, at the national and international levels, what the Holy See says to Governments, which, in summary, is that *our common home must continue to be built on a right understanding of universal brotherhood and on respect for the sacredness of every human life, of each man and each woman, of the poor, of the aged, of children, of the sick, of the newborn, the unemployed, the abandoned, of those judged expendable because they are considered nothing more than statistics. Our common home must also be built upon the understanding of a certain sacredness in creation.*

*Such an understanding and respect demand a higher level of wisdom, which accepts the transcendent element – even in ourselves –, which eschews the creation of an all-powerful elite and understands that the true sense of our individual and collective lives is found in the disinterested service of the other and in the prudent and respectful use of creation, for the common good. Repeating the words of Pope Paul VI, “the construction of modern civilisation must be based on spiritual principles, capable not only of supporting it, but of illuminating and animating it” (ibid).*