



Convention on the Rights of the Child

Distr.: General
22 October 2012

Original: English

Committee on the Rights of the Child

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 8, paragraph 1, of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict

Initial reports of States parties due in 2003

Holy See* **

[17 May 2010]

* In accordance with the information transmitted to States parties regarding the processing of their reports, the present document was not edited.

** Annexes are reproduced as received, in the language of submission only.

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I. Introduction

1. The Holy See deposited the instruments of ratification on Oct. 24, 2001 for the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). It was the seventh State to ratify the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict (OPAC).
2. The Holy See submits its initial report pursuant to article 8, paragraphs 1 and 2, of OPAC. Subsequent information related to the implementation of the Optional Protocols will be included in the Holy See's Periodic Report under the CRC.
3. The Holy See duly notes the Guidelines for OPAC as set out in CRC/C/OPAC/2 (19 October 2007). The Holy See has taken them into consideration as far as possible given its proper nature.

II. The Holy See and international law

4. The Holy See is a sovereign subject of international law having an original, non-derived legal personality independent of any authority or jurisdiction. The Holy See has diplomatic relations with 177 States and participates as a Member or Permanent Observer to the United Nations and several specialized Agencies of the UN System, as well as in various universal or regional Intergovernmental Organizations:

(a) The internal law of the Catholic Church refers to the Holy See as the government of the universal Church composed of the Roman Pontiff and of the institutions which proceed from him. (cf. Code of Canon Law (CIC), can. 361; cf. Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches (CCEO), c. 48);

(b) The Holy See also exercises its sovereignty over the territory of Vatican City State (VCS), established in 1929 to ensure the Holy See's absolute and evident independence and sovereignty for the accomplishment of its worldwide moral mission, and including all actions related to international relations. (cf. Lateran Treaty, preamble and arts. 2–3); and

(c) The international personality of the Holy See has never been confused with that of the territories over which it has exercised State sovereignty (e.g. the Papal States from 754 to 1870 and VCS since 1929). Indeed, following the end of the traditional Papal States in 1870 until the establishment of VCS in 1929, the Holy See continued to act as a subject of international law by concluding concordats and international treaties with States, participating in international conferences, conducting mediation and arbitration missions, and maintaining both active and passive diplomatic relations.

5. When the Holy See ratifies or accedes to an international agreement following international law and practice, it intends also to manifest its moral authority and thereby encourages States to ratify the treaty and to accomplish their respective obligations. Indeed, within the international community the Holy See elaborates on juridical, social and moral principles founded upon right reason which are addressed to the whole of humanity and not to Catholic believers alone. As the development of human rights demonstrates, international life cannot dispense with common moral values of an objective nature. The Holy See, for its part, is doing all it can towards the advancement of moral principles and of the conditions for ensuring peace, justice and social progress in a context of ever more effective respect and promotion of the human person and of his or her rights.

III. General considerations in regard to the Convention

6. The Holy See reiterates its support for the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) which acknowledges that the “child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth.” (CRC (1989), preamble para. 9; cf. Declaration on the Rights of the Child (“DRC”) (1959), preamble para. 3).

7. The Holy See reaffirms its three reservations and one interpretative declaration made in accordance with art. 51 of the CRC. These were necessary in light of the fact that the CRC is “a minimal basis for reaching an agreement, and therefore contains areas with which the parties are not completely satisfied.” (CRC/C/3/Add.27, para. 13).

8. As regards the reservations, the Holy See “interprets the phrase ‘Family planning, education and services’ in art. 24. 2, to mean only those methods of family planning which it considers morally acceptable, that is, the natural methods of family planning.” The Holy See “interprets the articles of the [CRC] in a way which safeguards the primary and inalienable rights of parents, in particular insofar as these rights concern education (articles 13, 28), religion (article 14), association with others (article 15) and privacy (article 16).” The Holy See declares that “the application of the [CRC] be compatible in practice with the particular nature of [VCS] and of the sources of its objective law (art. 1, Law of 7 June 1929, N. II [as amended by the Law of 1 October 2008, N. LXXI]) and, in consideration of its limited extent, with its legislation in the matters of citizenship, access, and residence.” (See the United Nations official website: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc-reserve.htm>).

9. With respect to the interpretative declaration, the Holy See regards the CRC as “a proper and laudable instrument aimed at protecting the rights and interests of children ...” The Holy See “recognizes that the [CRC] represents an enactment of principles previously adopted by the United Nations, and once effective as a ratified instrument, will safeguard the rights of the child before as well as after birth, as expressly affirmed in the [DRC, preamble para. 3] and restated in the ninth preamble paragraph of the [CRC]. The Holy See remains confident that the ninth preamble paragraph will serve as the perspective by which the rest of the [CRC] will be interpreted, in conformity with art. 31 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties [VCLT] of 23 May 1969. By acceding to the [CRC], the Holy See intends to give renewed expression to its constant concern for the well-being of children and families. In consideration of its singular nature and position, the Holy See, in acceding to the Convention, does not intend to [derogate] in any way from its specific mission which is of a religious and moral character.” (cf. the United Nations official website: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc-reserve.htm>).

10. In regard to the rights of the child, the Holy See, in adhering to its legal order, reaffirms its longstanding convictions and in this regard endorses that which was stated in its initial report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, and recently reaffirmed in the Holy See’s initial report on the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (CRC/C/OPSC/VAT/1):

(a) *The Dignity of the Child.* The child’s rights flow from his or her inherent dignity as a human person, made in the image and likeness of God, by nature endowed with intelligence and free will. From the moment of conception, the child is equal in dignity to all human beings. (cf. CRC/C/3/Add.27, para. 4);

(b) *The Child’s Rights and Duties within the Context of the Family.* “Children’s rights cannot be seen outside the context of the family, the first and most vital unit of society. For that reason, protection of children’s rights cannot become fully effective unless

the family and its rights are fully respected by the legal systems of States and the international community.” (CRC/C/3/Add.27, para. 5; cf. Charter of the Rights of the Family (1983), preamble para. E);

(c) *The Child’s Rights and Duties Require the Special Protection and Promotion of the Family.* The family based on marriage is a natural society that “exists prior to the State or any other community, and possesses inherent rights which are inalienable.” Marriage is that “intimate union of life in complementarity between a man and a woman, which is constituted in the freely contracted and publicly expressed indissoluble bond of matrimony and is open to the transmission of life.” (CRC/C/3/Add.27, para. 6; Charter of the Rights of the Family (1983), preamble para. A, B);

(d) *The Child’s Well-being.* Obviously, children must be protected in cases where a proven abuse of a child’s rights (e.g. neglect, physical or sexual abuse, violence) has been committed within the family. Beyond such cases, however, civil authorities must not intervene in the family and interfere with the duties and rights of parents, who are presumed to act for the well-being of their child, especially as regards matters pertaining to primary care, religion, education, association with others, and privacy. (CRC/C/3/Add.27, para. 16 (b));

(e) *Child’s Right and Duty as regards Life and Parents’ Duties and Rights.* The human being has the inherent right to life in every phase of development, from conception until natural death, and in every human condition (e.g. sick, disabled, or poor). And parents have the primary and inalienable duty and right to ensure that their child’s right to life is respected (e.g. abortion and experimental exploitation of the human embryo are direct violations of the fundamental right to life). (cf. CRC/C/3/Add.27, para. 7; Charter of the Rights of the Family (1983), art. 4);

(f) *Child’s Right and Duty as regards Education and Parents’ Duties and Rights.* Every child in virtue of his or her inherent dignity as a human person, has the inalienable right to education. And parents have the primary and inalienable duty and right to educate their children, which includes the free choice of schools or other necessary means, in keeping with parental convictions (e.g. parental rights and duties are violated when educational programs are imposed by the State over the objection of the parents). (cf. CRC/C/3/Add.27, para. 9; Charter on the Rights of the Family (1983), art. 5); and

(g) *Child’s Right and Duty as regards Religious Freedom and Parents’ Duties and Rights.* Freedom of religion is based on “the very dignity of the human person as known through the revealed word of God and by reason itself.” And parents have the duty and right “to decide in accordance with their own religious beliefs the form of religious upbringing which is to be given to their children.” (CRC/C/3/Add.27, para. 11; cf. Charter on the Rights of the Family (1983), art. 5).

IV. Affirmation of the rights of the child in the teachings and activities of the Holy See relating to the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict

A. General measures

1. Roman Pontiff and his Dicasteries (Guidelines 6, 7, 8).

11. In further regard to chapter II, *supra*, and in specific regard to OPAC, the Roman Pontiff has spoken directly on the topic of the child soldier, but also about its wider context

(e.g. migrant children, refugee and asylum seeking children, respect for humanitarian law, etc).

12. As a consequence, in annual messages, addresses, and speeches too numerous to cite, the Roman Pontiff has forcefully condemned the use and exploitation of children in all circumstances, including armed conflict (see *infra*). He has promoted the need for prevention programs to assist especially vulnerable children at risk for recruitment (e.g. orphans, unaccompanied refugee minors, undocumented children, uneducated children, street children, and so forth) (see *infra*). He has also encouraged protection, rehabilitation, and reintegration measures, especially through the participation of his delegates in various international fora (see *infra*). He also teaches and carries out activities through his different dicasteries or departments that proceed from him, especially: the Pontifical Council for the Family (PCF), Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (PCJP), Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People (PCMIP), the Congregation for Catholic Education (CCE), and the Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care (PCHPC) (see *infra*);

13. He and his dicasteries also encourage activities that are accomplished by the local Church, religious congregations, and Catholic associations in accordance with their own authority under canon law, and with due regard to the law of the respective States, in which they operate. Consequently, this report highlights not only the teachings and activities of the Holy See but also the direct assistance given — at the local level — to child victims (or children at risk) for their physical and psychological recovery, rehabilitation and social reintegration related to OPAC (see *infra*). The significance of these local activities for the world community can be gleaned from the following comments of the Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations: “I was inspired when Mr. Otunnu [Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict] told me recently that the first persons he most often meets when he visits conflict areas are religious men and women, priests and nuns dedicated to assisting the children who are victimized by the hatred of adults and forced to be part of conflicts which strip them of their freedom and innocence.” (Symposium, “Children in Armed Conflict: Everyone’s Responsibility” (2001), co-sponsored by Holy See Observer Mission to the United Nations and the Office of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict).

2. Vatican City State (Guidelines 2, 3, 4, 10).

14. In further regard to what has already been stated in chapters II and III, *supra*, the following point is worth repeating. Any analysis of the law of VCS must always be seen in light of its proper nature: “That the application of the Convention be compatible in practice with the particular nature of the Vatican City State and of the sources of its objective law (art.1, Law of 7 June 1929, N. II) [as amended by the Law of 1 October 2008, N. LXXI] and in consideration of its limited extent, with its legislation in matters of citizenship, access and residence.”

15. *Pontifical Swiss Guard*. There is no body that constitutes a “military body” or “armed forces.” The Pontifical Swiss Guard is a body of 110 armed guards that provides security services for the Roman Pontiff and his residence (Disciplinary and Administrative Regulations of the Pontifical Swiss Guard, 2006, arts. 7, 1). The minimum age for entering the Pontifical Swiss Guard is 19 years of age. It is noteworthy that the Corps of Gendarmes is a special police force with general responsibility for security and public order that encompasses all regular police duties (Law of 16 July 2002, N. CCCLXXXIV, art. 13(3)), and the minimum age for entering is 21 years of age (Decree of 3 May 1995, N. CCXXXI, art. 9 (4)).

16. *Declaration under Art. 3 (Guideline 5)*. The Holy See, in acceding to the OPAC, stated the following: “The Holy See, with regard to article 3, paragraph 2, of the Protocol, declares that, for what concerns the Vatican City State, the Regulations of the Pontifical

Swiss Guard, approved in 1976, establish that the recruitment of its members is only voluntary and that the minimum age is set forth at 19 years.”

17. Given the fact that Vatican City State has no armed forces or military properly so-called, the remainder of the report will focus on the teachings and the activities of the Holy See world wide.

B. Prevention (arts. 1, 2, 4 (2), 6 (2))

18. In specific regard to OPAC, art. 6 (1), (2), and Guidelines 15 and 17, the Holy See has manifested its support for the Optional Protocol by the very act of ratification, and it has exhorted other States to ratify it. In 2001, the Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations emphasized that “the fact that the Holy See has now ratified the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Right of the Child is another sign of its ceaseless recognition of the fundamental importance of protecting the human rights of children and promoting their well-being ... In depositing its instruments of ratification, the Holy See encourages all other States to join in furthering the legal protection of children by ratifying or acceding to the protocols.” (Symposium, “Children in Armed Conflict: Everyone’s Responsibility” (2001), co-sponsored by Holy See Observer Mission to the United Nations and the Office of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict).

1. Peace Education in the Family

19. The Holy See views education of children within the family as an indispensable part of confronting the “root causes” of the problems treated in the Optional Protocol (OPAC, preamble para. 16).

20. The Holy See promotes activities that protect and strengthen the family and supports parents in education of their children in values that are founded on a true understanding of the human person. Authentic love and peace, for example, must be built up on a daily basis and in order to prevent conflict, violence, and exploitation, they must take deep root within the heart of every human person. In this way, peace education is most likely to have a lasting effect and influence, not only on immediate members of the family, but also on the greater community (e.g. other families, intermediate groups, and political communities, both domestic and international).

21. Women, in particular, play an important role as “teachers of peace” since God has entrusted the human being to women in a special way. The primary relationship of the woman with the child, beginning from conception, offers unique opportunities for the mother-child bond and eventual peace education founded on authentic notions of truth, justice, freedom and solidarity. As a result, the Holy See encourages women to embrace their profound dignity as feminine persons created in the image and likeness of God; to nurture an inner peace founded on a desire to respond to God’s love; and to form others in the way of peace – children, husband, relatives, and the greater community (Pope John Paul II, Message for the World Day of Peace, Jan. 1, 2003, para.3; John Paul II, World Day of Peace Message, Jan. 1, 1995, paras.2, 5).

2. Peace Education in Schools

22. There are approximately 250,000 Catholic educational institutions in the world, with more than 42 million students. (cf. Office International pour l’Enseignement Catholique, OIEC, 2006). Educational activity takes place on two levels. The first level is “preventative” care through formal scholastic education. The second level focuses on rescue or problem solving that consists in non-formal education, although in close relationship with scholastic education. The activities described infra are promoted and

encouraged by the Holy See but accomplished by the local Church, religious congregations, Catholic associations and lay faithful in accordance with their own authority under canon law, and with due regard to the law of the respective States in which they conduct their activities. Many Catholic schools operate in areas where freedom of religion is not respected and as a result education in peace and dialogue is a priority. The following examples are particularly noteworthy (cf. Press Conference on the Presentation by the Congregation for Catholic Education of the document: “Educating Together in Catholic Schools. A Shared Mission between Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful,” 2007).

23. In Lebanon, the principle objective of Catholic Schools is to guide young people towards dialogue and collaboration between Moslems and Christians. Among the 210,000 students, there are 18 religious confessions represented: 63% Catholics; 12.6% Christians of other confessions and 24.4% non-Christians, the majority of which are Moslems. In some areas of the country non-Catholics make up 99% of the students at the Catholic Schools.

24. In the Holy Land (State of Israel, Palestinian Territories, Kingdom of Jordan) there are about 11 million inhabitants. Of these, 280,000 are Christians of whom 40,000 are Catholics. Of those attending Catholic Schools, 55% are Christians while 45% are non-Christians, the majority of which are Moslems with some students of the Jewish faith:

(a) In “*El Mutran Nazareth*” the “School of Saint Joseph” has about 1,200 Christian and Moslem students. The education plan is based on education in peace, learning to live together and accepting differences. The origin of this School gives additional testimony to its mission when one considers that it was founded by the Melkite-Greek priest, Fr. P. Emile Shoufani, as a sign of reconciliation after his father was assassinated; and

(b) In Jerusalem, the “Schmidts Girls College” founded in 1886 for young women has 5,000 students between 4 and 19 years of age, two thirds of whom are Moslem.

25. In Bosnia, during the war in the Balkans, the Archdiocese of Sarajevo established three Catholic Schools called “Schools for Europe” with the objective of welcoming Serbian, Croatian and Moslem students. It is a successful example of education in dialogue, reciprocal respect and acceptance, and parental involvement. These schools were initially attended only by 1,600 students. Today there are more than 10,000 students in 15 Catholic Schools.

26. In Morocco, “l’ECAM” (*Enseignement Catholique au Maroc*) has developed a Catholic educational program that promotes the integral formation of the student. Today there are 17 scholastic centers with thousands of students all of whom are Moslem. There are 600 educators, almost all Moroccan, and 17 male and female Directors (French and Lebanese; Moslems and Christians). The project is inspired by Christian values which are lived in the local community.

27. In Nepal, where the majority of the population is Hindus, there are only 6,000 Catholics among 23 million inhabitants. In 2004, the King granted a civic award to two missionaries for their commitment in the field of education. One was the Director of St. Mary’s School and the other was the founder of St Xavier College, the only Catholic College in Nepal. They received this honor for their contributions to the social, economic, cultural life and the development of the Nepalese population. This honor, conferred by a country with a Hindu majority, is a sign of appreciation for the educational service of the Catholic School which, through a quality curriculum of study, promotes mutual relations through education in peaceful cohabitation.

28. In Dakar, Senegal, the Marist Fathers established the Catholic School “*Sainte Marie de Hann*”, in 1949 and then in 1977 assimilated it with French high schools located outside

French territory. Today, it is attended by 3,500 students and 170 teachers. It is open to boys and girls from French speaking Western Africa, coming from all religious confessions and socio-economic backgrounds. The Marist Fathers eventually withdrew from this initiative and the Dioceses, with the assistance of the lay faithful, took up the cause, conserving its style and spirit. The school, which has received the UNESCO prize, follows an educational program geared to educate for peace and to promote dialogue among different cultures in an effort to build a world founded on brotherhood.

29. In South Africa, Sacred Heart College, situated in the outskirts of Johannesburg, has been opened to all people of different races since 1976. It provides education in a specific effort to combat racial discrimination. During the 1990s, of about 1200 students, 42% were Catholic, Caucasian and African, 37% were from other Christian denominations, 14% were Moslem, the majority of which were Asian and of middle Eastern descent, 5% Hindu and 1% Hebrew.

3. Peace Education in Society and the World Community.

30. The Holy See has adopted an integral approach to the problem of children in armed conflict by promoting peace and dialogue through its messages, addresses, writings, and activities. The following points are indicative of the Holy See's overall approach:

(a) The Holy See employs its moral and religious leadership to promote the universal values of the human spirit that constitute the four pillars of a peaceful society: truth, justice, love, and freedom (cf. Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, 1963; Pope John Paul II, World Day of Peace Message, 2003). To this end, it encourages development of the whole human person, a body-soul unity, inclusive of both the spiritual and material dimensions. It advances moral and ethical evaluation, in every field of knowledge (e.g. economic, political, cultural, social), based on the true good and authentic development of the whole man and all men. It also unveils ideologies that degrade the human person and his or her integral growth (cf. Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 2009, paras. 14–18, 31);

(b) As noted in paras. 19-21, supra, the Holy See promotes healthy family life, an intimate communion of love and life based on marriage between one man and one woman, which constitutes the “primary place of humanization for the person and society” and therefore “rightly defined as the first natural society.” This divine institution, the foundation of human life, constitutes “the prototype of every social order.” It is where one experiences “some of the fundamental elements of peace: justice and love between brothers and sisters, the role of authority expressed by parents, loving concern for the members who are weaker because of youth, sickness or old age, mutual help in the necessities of life, readiness to accept others and, if necessary, to forgive them.” For these reasons, the family is the “first and indispensable teacher of peace” in society. (Pope Benedict XVI, World Day of Peace Message, 2008, paras. 2–3);

(c) The Holy See promotes respect for an authentic understanding of human rights with special emphasis on the rights of the family, but also advances the “logic of giving and forgiving,” which goes beyond merely giving to the other what is his or her due, in giving to him or her, that which is mine (cf. Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, 1963; Pope John Paul II, World Day of Peace Message, 2008; Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 2009, para. 6). It urges a sustained commitment to the promotion of a “person-based and community-orientated cultural process of world-wide integration that is open to transcendence,” to communion and to the sharing of goods (cf. Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 2009, paras. 42, 26, 55);

(d) The Holy See supports collaborative efforts to reduce or eliminate destabilizing social factors (e.g. underdevelopment, economic disparity, poverty, armed

conflict, the proliferation of small weapons, lack of respect for international humanitarian law, problems associated with human mobility) (cf. Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 2009). It encourages all, especially through the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, to promote authentic peace and integral human development, inclusive of man's spiritual and material dimensions;

(e) The Holy See contends that "religions can and must offer precious resources to build a humanity of peace, because they speak of peace at the heart of man." (Pope Benedict XVI, Pastoral Visit to Naples, and Address to Heads of Delegations Taking Part In the International Encounter for Peace, 2007). Consistent with this conviction, the Holy See promotes interreligious dialogue through various messages and meetings, and the work of the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue; and

(f) In sum, the broader context of the problem associated with children in armed conflict involves the position of the most vulnerable of human beings in times of civil disorder and violence. Consequently, prevention of recruitment and use of children is tied to the overall health of civil society, which in turn, is linked to the condition of its most basic unit, the natural family, "the cradle of life and love" (Pope Benedict XVI, World Day of Peace Message, 2008, para. 2).

C. Prohibition (arts. 1–4)

31. As regards arts. 1, 2, 3, 4 of OPAC, since January 1, 1968, the first day of the year has been dedicated to the celebration of the World Day of Peace and on each occasion the Roman Pontiff has directed a message to the entire world. The annual messages are interrelated in that each highlights a different aspect of the discussion about peace as it relates to human rights, international law, women and so forth. Almost every message has accented the plight of children. Two peace messages are especially noteworthy:

(a) In the 2007 World Day of Peace Message, "The Human Person: The Heart of Peace", Pope Benedict XVI condemned all forms of exploitation of children and offered a response to the problem founded on "an authentic integral humanism." He exhorted people of good will to cultivate the awareness of everyone's transcendental dignity as a human person created in the image and likeness of God. From this proposition, he argued that it necessarily followed that "a fundamental element of building peace is the recognition of the essential equality of human persons." He strongly emphasized that there is no justification for children to be used at will by those with greater physical, economic, political, technical or military power;

(b) In 1996, the World Day of Peace Message was specifically devoted to children and entitled "Let us Give Children a Future of Peace." Pope John Paul II in particular discussed the "child soldier" and argued that children had a "right to learn peace" in both historical and practical terms. He presented the family as the first school of peace, where children can be offered a real chance to build fraternity and solidarity, and become "messengers of peace." In this way, they can enrich adults, who need to learn from children the ways of God.

32. Two of his dicasteries have been particularly active in addressing the plight of the children in armed conflict:

(a) The PCJP clearly condemns the recruitment and use of children as soldiers in hostilities and armed conflicts in its publication the "Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church" (CSDC). It notes that such children are "[o]bliged by force to take part in combat or choosing to do so on their own initiative without being fully aware of the consequences, these children are not only deprived of an education and a normal childhood, they are also trained to kill." It maintains that this "constitutes an intolerable crime ... [and]

the use of child soldiers in combat forces of any kind must be stopped.” (CSDC, 2004, para. 512); and

(b) The PCMIP, in its publication *People on the Move*, describes the use and exploitation of children in armed conflict as “new slavery” or “modern day slavery.” It graphically portrays the horrific problem of the child soldier; highlights international and regional law prohibiting trafficking of children; underlines activities of the Holy See, and then moves to a discussion of important initiatives encouraged by the Holy See, although carried out by the local Church, religious congregations, and Catholic associations in Africa, all in accordance with their own authority in canon law, and pursuant to the laws of the respective States, in which they operate (PCMIP, “A Burning Issue: Migration and New Slavery”, in *People on the Move*, N° 109 (Suppl.) P. 135, April 2009).

D. Protection, recovery and reintegration (art. 6 (3))

1. The Roman Pontiff and his Dicasteries

33. Over the years, the Roman Pontiff has made many appeals, too numerous to cite, for the protection, recovery and reintegration of children. His statements have addressed all children, including those involved in armed conflict. The following two examples are noteworthy:

(a) In 2010, Pope Benedict XVI devoted the annual Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees to “Minor Migrants and Refugees.” In this message he refers to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, highlights the increasing numbers of children migrating alone or fleeing from their countries, and then, advocates for carefully coordinated “measures of prevention, protection and welcome.” He makes a special appeal to parishes, and Catholic associations, “imbued with a spirit of faith and charity, [to] take pains to meet the needs of these brothers and sisters” and to live the “Gospel of Solidarity” by showing “hospitality and solidarity to strangers, especially if they are children”; and

(b) In 2007, during a pastoral visit to Uganda, the President of the PCJP, on behalf of the Holy See, argued that “[t]he dramatic situation of child-soldiers cannot be considered resolved simply because hostilities have ceased in a country, where until yesterday these minors were engaged in warfare.” The international community was urged to involve itself in addressing an emergency that remains “an open issue” in many nations, where negotiated accords fail to guarantee social reintegration of former combatants. It was noted that a youth taking up weapons is against nature. A “mobilization of consciences” was said to be indispensable to ensure their “full integration into the workforce,” and international donors were exhorted to provide adequate funding in this regard.

34. Similar statements have been made by the dicasteries, in various addresses, speeches, and publications:

(a) The PCJP states that “every possible assistance must be given to the care, education and rehabilitation of those children who have been involved in combat” (CSDC, para. 512);

(b) The PCMIP calls on the world community to promote and give appropriate “assistance and protection” to former combatants, especially as regards their recovery and reintegration, and strongly urges members of the Catholic Church to participate (e.g. lay persons, priests, religious, dioceses, parishes, Episcopal Conferences). (PCMIP, “A Burning Issue: Migration and New Slavery”, in *People on the Move*, N° 109 (Suppl.) P. 135, April 2009); and

(c) The PCMIP also provides informative material about the general problem in an effort to increase awareness for the need of protection, recovery and reintegration of

child victims. For example, it highlights the related dilemma about the increased availability of light and small weaponry for children. It then gives an overview of international and regional laws, which recognize the plight of the child soldier as a human rights question. Finally, it sets out the pastoral issues including those regarding prevention and rehabilitation. (PCMIP, "Hidden Displacement: Child Soldiers," in *People on the Move*, N° 81, December 1999).

2. Local Activities Encouraged by the Holy See

35. As previously mentioned the Holy See proposes a holistic and integrated approach in an effort to stimulate the conscience of individuals and the whole of humanity. It encourages activities carried out by the local Church, religious congregations, and Catholic associations, in accordance with their own authority in canon law, and pursuant to the laws of the respective States, in which they operate. The overall approach of the Holy See translates, at the local level, into assisting former child soldiers by being present with them, "listening to them, providing assistance, giving support to escape from sexual violence, creating safe houses, counseling geared towards integration into society or helping them to return in a sustainable way to their home country." (PCMIP, "A Burning Issue: Migration and New Slavery", in *People on the Move*, N° 109 (Suppl.) P. 135, April 2009).

36. In further regard to Catholic schools, and the second level of formation mentioned in para. 22 supra, as previously mentioned, many schools or institutions focus on rescue or problem solving that consists in non-formal education, although in close relationship with scholastic education. Many pastoral activities are carried out throughout the world which attempt to rescue or otherwise assist children. In specific regard to the child soldier, the following examples are noteworthy:

(a) *Uganda*. The "Uganda Catholic Education Department" has a project for rescuing and reinserting child soldiers into the educational system. This program, carried out in collaboration with the Catholic missionaries, has achieved remarkable results. In addition, the remarkable and heroic efforts of individual teachers must also be acknowledged. For example, when 139 girls of St. Mary's College boarding school in Aboke, Uganda, were kidnapped, the vice president of the school, a sister of the Comboni Missionaries, reportedly succeeded in rescuing 109 of girls before they vanished without a trace, like the 30 others (Els de Temmerman, "*The Girls of Aboke: Children Abducted in Northern Uganda*," 1995); and

(b) *Rwanda*. The "City of Children" Project, developed with the assistance of the PCF, helps countless abandoned children by providing medical and psychological services and education (e.g. moral, religious, and cultural) as well as general care and formation. This initiative takes into consideration the "best interest of the child" in reference to a Christian anthropological perspective and considers the well-being of the child within the context of the family. The children receive an integral education that would otherwise be unattainable. The project constitutes a good practice in the community, since similar projects in other dioceses, parishes and institutions have been initiated. Presently, there are about 12 to 14 family homes sheltering children. There is also a multipurpose hall; central kitchen; medical clinic that offers psycho-social services for traumatized children; sports area; primary school for children; and chapel. All this has been made possible by the generous collaboration of various benefactors. To date, there are 219 children residents and 131 non-residents.

37. Many Catholic associations assist the child soldier in accordance with their own authority as noted in para. 35, supra. For example, the following publications of two associations are especially noteworthy:

(a) The Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) has been running a Transit and Reception Centre in South Kivu (DRC) for child soldiers, who succeeded in leaving armed groups (JRS, *Understanding the Phenomenon of Child Soldiers*, 2007); and

(b) The group Pax Christi completed an important study on the demobilization process and the reintegration of former child soldiers into Colombian society (Pax Christi, "A New Beginning – An Open End," 2006).

38. The local Church, sometimes working alone, or in cooperation with religious congregations and Catholic associations, is also very active in accordance with their own authority described in para. 35, *supra*.

(a) The various Conferences of Bishops play an important role, since many former child soldiers, victims of abuse, have spoken privately to Church officials due to shame or lack of civic organizational structures. For example, the Bishops' Conference of Gambia and Sierra Leone has publicly denounced the elevated number of abducted children and increasing violence against children during the last 6 years of war in Sierra Leone;

(b) The Diocesan Offices for Human Development have been especially active in Ghana, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Zambia. They undertake activities that promote respect for value and dignity of human life, support for victims of violence, and provision of services for the needy, including access to educational and religious formation, which is imbued with a spirit of solidarity. For example, in 2000, the Diocese of Makeni, gave shelter, food, clothes to 1,000 children and freed 700 child soldiers (Symposium, "Children in Armed Conflict: Everyone's Responsibility" (2001), co-sponsored by Holy See Observer Mission to the United Nations and the Office of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, p. 8). In some Dioceses, Consultants for Youth deal with social problems and focus on issues pertaining to teenage mothers and victims of violence.

39. Activities in the following countries are particularly noteworthy:

(a) *Democratic Republic of Congo*. The Diocese of Bunia is involved through Caritas in the reintegration of child soldiers by providing them counselling (JRS, *Understanding the Phenomenon of Child Soldiers*, 2007);

(b) *Colombia*. Pax Christi has been involved in investigating various aspects of the government's individual reintegration and reconciliation program, with a view to determining factors that contribute to successful reintegration into civil society. The report recommends the involvement of other citizens, civil society groups, Churches, and the international community (Pax Christi, "A New Beginning – An Open End," 2006);

(c) *Liberia*. Two main centres for demobilized child soldiers in Monrovia are operated by Don Bosco Homes of the Catholic Church. Many children have expressed the desire to return to school, however, community-based structures or schools have been destroyed and require urgent renovation. Therefore, in the Don Bosco Homes formal education and skills training are a priority. Many former child soldiers have had to stay in such interim care centres for longer than the maximum recommended period of 12 weeks, since they are too frightened to return to their home and communities, where no facilities exist to assist them to reintegrate into their families and society;

(d) *Sierra Leone*. Since the national disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programme ended in December 2003, about 72,500 former combatants have been mobilized including 4,750 women and 6,787 children. Catholic NGOs have reached out to women and children, who were excluded from receiving benefits associated with the national programme, designated only for male combatants. For example, "Caritas Makeni" has developed a rehabilitation and reintegration project which includes alternative income generation, counselling, and health programmes that recognize the importance of traditions and customs in the trauma-healing process. The one-year program, which has been

operating for 7 years and takes about 250 young women per year, provides foster care arrangements for young mothers to enable them to attend school, and follows up by providing them guidance upon its successful completion. Similarly, “Children Associated with War” (CAW), in the Archdiocese of Freetown, deals with the physical, emotional and psycho-social needs of child soldiers, unaccompanied minors, sexually abused girls and adolescent girl mothers. It engages in efforts associated with family tracing and reintegration into families and communities. To this end, it has developed a six month social and economic reintegration program, which has benefited about 2,500 children so far; and

(e) *Cote d’Ivoire*. A Roman Catholic priest runs a youth centre in the north of Cote d’Ivoire to rehabilitate former child soldiers; they receive intensive counselling and psychological services. This centre for children also supervises the education and entertainment of several hundred other children who are especially vulnerable to falling under the spell of those who carry guns. Finally, the Diocese of Man renovated a centre for former child soldiers, in 2004.

E. International assistance and cooperation (art. 7)

40. *Ordinary session of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (2007)*. The Holy See argued that “the target of eliminating violence against children and of providing a constructive and healthy context for their development demands that the State and society concretely support and enable the family to carry out its task ... A coherent effort to eliminate violence against children will ... reject the exaltation of violence in the public culture of society ... Education becomes a critical instrument.”

41. *United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Children (2002)*. The intervention of the Holy See condemned the kidnapping of children and “their use as soldiers or guerrillas.” It called these scourges “an affront and a scandal to humanity” and said they could not “go unpunished.”

42. *Collaboration with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children in Armed conflict (2001)*. For example, the Holy See Observer Mission to the United Nations and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict co-sponsored the symposium “Children in Armed Conflict: Everyone’s Responsibility” (2001).

43. *Addresses to Ambassadors to the Holy See*. For example, on May 29, 2008, when Pope Benedict XVI accepted the Letters of Credence of the Ambassador of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, he noted the “disturbing trend of recruiting children to engage in combat or in terrorist activities.” The Pope argued that “[s]uch practices must be condemned at the outset, for they inevitably stunt the moral development of children, leaving scars that last a lifetime ... and tearing the moral fiber of society itself. Jesus admonished men and women to avoid causing scandal towards these “little ones” (cf. *Lk* 17:2), even instructing adults to imitate their virtue and purity (cf. *Mt* 18:2).” He implored leaders in Sri Lanka and throughout the world to remain vigilant so that no compromise would be made in this regard.

44. *Other International Conferences and Meetings*. Representatives of the dicasteries have participated in various conferences and meetings focused on the pastoral concern of the Church as regards the rights of children in situations of exploitation and combat. The following examples are noteworthy:

(a) *Refugees, Asylum Seekers, Migrants and the Plight of Children*. In June 2006, members of the PCJP spoke at an event which launched the International Coalition on the Detention of Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Migrants composed of 100 human

rights groups from 36 countries worldwide. Among the groups that participated were those dealing specifically with issues pertaining to refugee children, obviously particularly vulnerable to exploitation of every kind, including forcible recruitment. All groups were seeking alternatives to the imprisonment of migrants and refugees, which penalizes human beings in great need. “Arbitrary imprisonment poisons human society. It harms those who practice it as well as those who suffer it”; and

(b) *Trafficking: Children, Drugs, Weapons*. In November 2006, officials from the PCJP participated in the Inter-parliamentary Assembly sponsored by the Institute for Religion and Public Policy. During these discussions, concern was expressed for the trafficking in human beings, drugs and weapons, and specific insights were given on how the problem is affecting women and children. This assembly also noted that freedom of religion had an important role to play in the search for authentic peace and stability as well as mutual respect and understanding. Numerous Catholic non-profit organizations and Christian associations emphasized their respective roles in stopping the trafficking in human persons and providing victim assistance and protection. It was noted that, in many cases, the efforts of these organizations and associations had commenced long before the involvement of State authorities.

Annexes

Annex I

Message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II for the XXIX World Day of Peace

1 January 1996

Let us Give Children a Future of Peace

1. At the end of 1994, the International Year of the Family, I wrote a Letter to the children of the whole world, asking them to pray that humanity would increasingly become God's family, living in harmony and peace. I have frequently expressed my heartfelt concern for children who are victims of armed conflicts and other kinds of violence, and I have not failed to call these serious situations to the attention of world public opinion.

At the beginning of this new year, my thoughts turn once again to children and to their legitimate hope for love and peace. I feel bound to mention in a particular way children who are suffering and those who often grow to adulthood without ever having experienced peace. Children's faces should always be happy and trusting, but at times they are full of sadness and fear: how much have these children already seen and suffered in the course of their short lives!

Let us give children a future of peace! This is the confident appeal which I make to men and women of good will, and I invite everyone to help children to grow up in an environment of authentic peace. This is their right, and it is our duty.

Children who are victims of war

2. I begin by thinking of the great crowds of children whom I have met during the years of my Pontificate, especially during my Apostolic Visits to every continent: joyful children who are full of happiness. My thoughts turn to them at the beginning of this new year.

It is my hope that all children of the world will be able to begin 1996 in happiness and to enjoy a peaceful childhood, with the help of responsible adults.

I pray that everywhere a harmonious relationship between adults and children will promote a climate of peace and authentic well-being. Sadly, many of the world's children are innocent victims of war. In recent years millions of them have been wounded or killed: a veritable slaughter.

The special protection accorded to children by international law¹ has been widely disregarded, and the dramatic increase of regional and inter-ethnic conflicts has made it difficult to implement the protective measures called for by humanitarian regulations. Children have even become targets of snipers, their schools deliberately destroyed, and the

¹ Cf. United Nations Convention of 20 November 1989 on the rights of children, especially Article 38; the Fourth Geneva Convention of 12 August 1949 for the protection of civilians in wartime, Article 24; Protocols I and II of 12 December 1977, etc.

hospitals where they are cared for bombed. In the face of such horrendous misdeeds, how can we fail to speak out with one voice in condemnation? The deliberate killing of a child is one of the most disturbing signs of the breakdown of all respect for human life.² In addition to the children who have been killed, my thoughts also turn to those who have been maimed during or after these conflicts. I likewise think of young people who are systematically hunted down, raped or killed during so-called “ethnic cleansings”.

3. Children are not only victims of the violence of wars; many are forced to take an active part in them. In some countries of the world it has come to the point where even very young boys and girls are compelled to serve in the army of the warring parties. Enticed by the promise of food and schooling, they are confined to remote camps, where they suffer hunger and abuse and are encouraged to kill even people from their own villages. Often they are sent ahead to clear minefields. Clearly, the life of children has little value for those who use them in this way!

The future of young people who have taken up arms is often compromised.

After years of military service, some are simply discharged and sent home, where they often fail to fit into civilian life. Others, ashamed of having survived when their companions have not, frequently end up as criminals or drug addicts. Who knows what nightmares must continue to afflict them! Will their minds ever be free of the memories of violence and death?

The humanitarian and religious organizations which attempt to relieve these inhuman sufferings deserve heartfelt respect. Thanks are also owed to those generous individuals and families who welcome orphans with love, and do everything they can to heal their traumas and to help them to fit once more into the communities from which they came.

4. The memory of the millions of children who have been killed, and the sad faces of so many others who are suffering compel us to take every possible measure to safeguard or re-establish peace, and to bring conflicts and wars to an end.

Before the Fourth World Conference on Women which took place in Beijing last September, I asked Catholic charitable and educational institutions to adopt a co-ordinated strategy which gives priority to issues concerning children and young women, especially those most in need.³ Now I wish to renew that appeal, and to extend it in a special way to Catholic institutions and organizations which deal with children. I ask them to help girls who have suffered as a result of war and violence, to teach boys to acknowledge and respect the dignity of women, and to help all children to rediscover the tenderness of the love of God who took flesh, and who by dying left the world the gift of his peace (cf. Jn 14:27).

I will continue to point out that all, from the most prominent international organizations to local associations, from Heads of State to ordinary citizens, in everyday actions and at the most significant moments of life, are called upon to make a contribution to peace and to give no support to war.

² Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium vitae* (25 March 1995), n. 3: AAS 87 (1995), 404.

³ Cf. Message to the Delegation of the Holy See at the Fourth World Conference on Women (29 August 1995): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 30 August 1995, p. 1.

Children who are victims of various forms of violence

5. Millions of children suffer from other kinds of violence present both in poverty-stricken and in developed societies. These kinds of violence are often less obvious, but they are no less terrible.

The International Summit for Social Development which took place this year in Copenhagen stressed the connection between poverty and violence,⁴ and on that occasion States committed themselves to a greater battle against poverty through initiatives at the national level, beginning in 1996.⁵ Similar suggestions were made by the earlier World Conference of the United Nations on Children, held in New York in 1990. Poverty is indeed the cause of inhuman living and working conditions. In some countries children are forced to work at a tender age and are often badly treated, harshly punished, and paid absurdly low wages.

Because they have no way of asserting their rights, they are the easiest to blackmail and exploit.

In other circumstances children are bought and sold,⁶ so that they can be used for begging or, even worse, forced into prostitution, as in the case of so-called "sex tourism". This utterly despicable trade degrades not only those who take part in it but also those who in any way promote it. Some do not hesitate to enlist children in criminal activities, especially the selling of narcotics, thus exposing them to the risk of personal involvement in drug use.

Many children end up with the street as their only home. Having run away, or having been abandoned by their families, or never having known a family environment, these young people live by their wits and in a state of total neglect, and they are considered by many as refuse to be eliminated.

6. Sadly, violence towards children is found even in wealthy and affluent families. Such cases are infrequent, but it is important not to overlook them. Sometimes children are taken advantage of and suffer abuse within the home itself, at the hands of people whom they should be able to trust, to the detriment of their development.

Many children are also compelled to endure the trauma caused by fighting between their parents, or by the actual breakup of the family. Concern for the children's welfare does not prevent solutions which are often dictated by the selfishness and hypocrisy of adults. Behind an appearance of normality and peacefulness, masked even further by an abundance of material possessions, children are at times forced to grow up in dismal loneliness, without firm and loving guidance and a suitable moral formation. Left to themselves, such children usually find their main contact with reality in television programmes which often present unreal and immoral situations which they are still too young to assess properly.

It is no wonder if this kind of widespread and pernicious violence also has its effect on their young hearts, changing their natural enthusiasm into disillusionment or cynicism, and their instinctive goodness into indifference or selfishness. When young people chase after false ideals, they can experience bitterness and humiliation, hostility and hatred, absorbing the discontent and emptiness all around them. Everyone is well aware of how childhood experiences can have profound and sometimes irreparable consequences on an individual's whole life.

⁴ Cf. Copenhagen Declaration, n. 16.

⁵ Cf. Programme of Action, Chapter II.

⁶ Cf. Programme of Action, n. 39 (e).

It can hardly be hoped that children will one day be able to build a better world, unless there is a specific commitment to their education for peace. Children need to “learn peace”: it is their right, and one which cannot be disregarded.

Children and hope for peace

7. I have sought to emphasize strongly the often tragic conditions in which many children are living today. I consider this my duty: they will be the adults of the Third Millennium. But I have no intention of yielding to pessimism or ignoring the signs of hope. How can I fail to mention, for example, the many families in every part of the world in which children grow up in an atmosphere of peace? And how can we not note the efforts being made by so many individuals and organizations to enable children in difficulty to grow up in peace and happiness? Public and private associations, individual families and particular communities have taken initiatives the only purpose of which is to help children who have suffered some traumatic event to return to a normal life. In particular, educational programmes have been developed for encouraging children and young people to use fully their personal talents, in order to become true peacemakers.

There is also a growing awareness in the international community which, in recent years, despite difficulties and hesitation, has made efforts to deal decisively and systematically with problems connected with childhood.

The results achieved thus far encourage us to continue these praiseworthy endeavours. If children are properly helped and loved, they themselves can become peacemakers, builders of a world of fraternity and solidarity. With their enthusiasm and youthful idealism, young people can become “witnesses” and “teachers” of hope and peace to adults. Lest these possibilities be lost, children should be offered, in a way adapted to their individual needs, every opportunity for a balanced personal growth.

A peaceful childhood will enable boys and girls to face the future with confidence. Let no one stifle their joyful enthusiasm and hope.

Children in the school of peace

8. Little children very soon learn about life. They watch and imitate the behaviour of adults. They rapidly learn love and respect for others, but they also quickly absorb the poison of violence and hatred. Family experiences strongly condition the attitudes which children will assume as adults. Consequently, if the family is the place where children first encounter the world, the family must be for children the first school of peace.

Parents have an extraordinary opportunity to help their sons and daughters to become aware of this great treasure: the witness of their mutual love. It is by loving each other that they enable the child, from the very first moment of its existence, to grow up in peaceful surroundings, imbued with the positive values which make up the family’s true heritage: mutual respect and acceptance, listening, sharing, generosity, forgiveness. Thanks to the sense of working together which these values foster, they provide a true education for peace and make the child, from its earliest years, an active builder of peace.

Children share with their parents and brothers and sisters the experience of life and hope. They see how life’s inevitable trials are met with humility and courage, and they grow up in an atmosphere of esteem for others and respect for opinions different from their own.

It is above all in the home that, before ever a word is spoken, children should experience God’s love in the love which surrounds them. In the family they learn that God wants peace and mutual understanding among all human beings, who are called to be one great family.

9. Besides the basic education provided by the family, children have a right to a specific training for peace at school and in other educational settings.

These institutions have a duty to lead children gradually to understand the nature and demands of peace within their world and culture. Children need to learn the history of peace and not simply the history of victory and defeat in war.

Let us show them examples of peace and not just examples of violence! Fortunately many positive examples of this can be found in every culture and period of history. Suitable new educational opportunities must be created, especially in those situations where cultural and moral poverty has been most oppressive. Everything possible should be done to help children to become messengers of peace.

Children are not a burden on society; they are not a means of profit or people without rights. Children are precious members of the human family, for they embody its hopes, its expectations and its potential.

Jesus, the way of peace

10. Peace is a gift of God; but men and women must first accept this gift in order to build a peaceful world. People can do this only if they have a childlike simplicity of heart. This is one of the most profound and paradoxical aspects of the Christian message: to become child-like is more than just a moral requirement but a dimension of the mystery of the Incarnation itself.

The Son of God did not come in power and glory, as he will at the end of the world, but as a child, needy and poor.

Fully sharing our human condition in all things but sin (cf. Heb 4:15), he also took on the frailty and hope for the future which are part of being a child.

After that decisive moment for the history of humanity, to despise childhood means to despise the One who showed the greatness of his love by humbling himself and forsaking all glory in order to redeem mankind.

Jesus identified with the little ones

When the Apostles were arguing about who was the greatest, he “took a child and put him by his side, and said to them, ‘Whoever receives this child in my name, receives me; and whoever receives me receives him who sent me’” (Lk 9:47–48). The Lord also forcefully warned us against giving scandal to children: “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened round his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea” (Mt 18:6).

Jesus asked the disciples to become “children” again. When they tried to turn away the little ones who were pressing in upon him, he said indignantly: “Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the Kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it” (Mk 10:14–15). Jesus thus turned around our way of thinking. Adults need to learn from children the ways of God: seeing children’s capacity for complete trust, adults can learn to cry out with true confidence, “Abba, Father!”.

11. To become like a little child — with complete trust in the Father and with the meekness taught by the Gospel — is not only an ethical imperative; it is a reason for hope. Even where the difficulties are so great as to lead to discouragement and the power of evil so overwhelming as to dishearten, those who can rediscover the simplicity of a child can begin to hope anew. This is possible above all for those who know they can trust in a God who desires harmony among all people in the peaceful communion of his Kingdom. It is

also possible for those who, though not sharing the gift of faith, believe in the values of forgiveness and solidarity and see in them — not without the hidden action of the Spirit — the possibility of renewing the face of the earth.

It is therefore to men and women of good will that I address this confident appeal. Let us all unite to fight every kind of violence and to conquer war!

Let us create the conditions which will ensure that children can receive as the legacy of our generation a more united and fraternal world!

Let us give children a future of peace!

From the Vatican, 8 December 1995

Annex II

Message of the Holy Father John Paul II to the Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Organization Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflicts

To Mr. Olara A. Otunnu

Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Organization

Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflicts

On the occasion of the Symposium *Children in Armed Conflicts: Everyone's Responsibility* being held at the United Nations Headquarters on June 5, 2001, and organized with your Office by the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See, I send cordial greetings to you and all taking part, and I assure you of my prayerful solidarity.

The theme of the Symposium draws much-needed attention to the sad plight of countless children who are victims of war in various parts of the world. The memory of those who have been killed and the continuing tribulations of so many others compel us to spare no effort to bring such conflicts and wars to an end, and to do everything possible to help their young victims return to a healthy and dignified life. In this regard, the United Nations Organization, together with other humanitarian and religious organizations, have been working tirelessly to relieve these inhuman sufferings. They deserve our gratitude, support and encouragement.

Children and young people are "precious members of the human family, for they embody its hopes, its expectations and its potential" (*Message for the World Day of Peace 1996*, No. 9). The challenge facing individuals and organizations, indeed the entire international community, is to ensure that children everywhere are given the possibility of growing up in peace and happiness. Then they too will become peacemakers, builders of a world of fraternity and solidarity.

With these thoughts, I pray that this important Symposium will lead to a greater awareness of the seriousness of the problems of children in situations of armed conflict. Upon all taking part I invoke abundant divine blessings.

From the Vatican, May 30, 2001

John Paul II

Annex III

Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for the celebration of the World Day of Peace

1 January 2007

The Human Person, the Heart of Peace

1. At the beginning of the new year, I wish to extend prayerful good wishes for peace to Governments, leaders of nations and all men and women of good will. In a special way, I invoke peace upon all those experiencing pain and suffering, those living under the threat of violence and armed aggression, and those who await their human and social emancipation, having had their dignity trampled upon. I invoke peace upon children, who by their innocence enrich humanity with goodness and hope, and by their sufferings compel us all to work for justice and peace. Out of concern for children, especially those whose future is compromised by exploitation and the malice of unscrupulous adults, I wish on this World Day of Peace to encourage everyone to reflect on the theme: The Human Person, the Heart of Peace. I am convinced that respect for the person promotes peace and that, in building peace, the foundations are laid for an authentic integral humanism. In this way a serene future is prepared for coming generations.

The human person and peace: gift and task

2. Sacred Scripture affirms that “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27). As one created in the image of God, each individual human being has the dignity of a person; he or she is not just something, but someone, capable of self-knowledge, self-possession, free self-giving and entering into communion with others. At the same time, each person is called, by grace, to a covenant with the Creator, called to offer him a response of faith and love that no other creature can give in his place.⁷ From this supernatural perspective, one can understand the task entrusted to human beings to mature in the ability to love and to contribute to the progress of the world, renewing it in justice and in peace. In a striking synthesis, Saint Augustine teaches that “God created us without our aid; but he did not choose to save us without our aid.”⁸ Consequently all human beings have the duty to cultivate an awareness of this twofold aspect of gift and task.

3. Likewise, peace is both gift and task. If it is true that peace between individuals and peoples — the ability to live together and to build relationships of justice and solidarity — calls for unfailing commitment on our part, it is also true, and indeed more so, that peace is a gift from God. Peace is an aspect of God’s activity, made manifest both in the creation of an orderly and harmonious universe and also in the redemption of humanity that needs to be rescued from the disorder of sin. Creation and Redemption thus provide a key that helps us begin to understand the meaning of our life on earth. My venerable predecessor Pope John Paul II, addressing the General Assembly of the United Nations on 5 October 1995, stated that “we do not live in an irrational or meaningless world ... there is a moral logic which is built into human life and which makes possible dialogue between individuals and

⁷ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 357.

⁸ *Sermo* 169, 11, 13: PL 38, 923.

peoples.”⁹ The transcendent “grammar”, that is to say the body of rules for individual action and the reciprocal relationships of persons in accordance with justice and solidarity, is inscribed on human consciences, in which the wise plan of God is reflected. As I recently had occasion to reaffirm: “we believe that at the beginning of everything is the Eternal Word, Reason and not Unreason.”¹⁰ Peace is thus also a task demanding of everyone a personal response consistent with God’s plan. The criterion inspiring this response can only be respect for the “grammar” written on human hearts by the divine Creator.

From this standpoint, the norms of the natural law should not be viewed as externally imposed decrees, as restraints upon human freedom. Rather, they should be welcomed as a call to carry out faithfully the universal divine plan inscribed in the nature of human beings. Guided by these norms, all peoples — within their respective cultures — can draw near to the greatest mystery, which is the mystery of God. Today too, recognition and respect for natural law represents the foundation for a dialogue between the followers of the different religions and between believers and non-believers. As a great point of convergence, this is also a fundamental presupposition for authentic peace.

The right to life and to religious freedom

4. The duty to respect the dignity of each human being, in whose nature the image of the Creator is reflected, means in consequence that the person can not be disposed of at will. Those with greater political, technical, or economic power may not use that power to violate the rights of others who are less fortunate. Peace is based on respect for the rights of all. Conscious of this, the Church champions the fundamental rights of each person. In particular she promotes and defends respect for the life and the religious freedom of everyone. Respect for the right to life at every stage firmly establishes a principle of decisive importance: life is a gift which is not completely at the disposal of the subject. Similarly, the affirmation of the right to religious freedom places the human being in a relationship with a transcendent principle which withdraws him from human caprice. The right to life and to the free expression of personal faith in God is not subject to the power of man. Peace requires the establishment of a clear boundary between what is at man’s disposal and what is not: in this way unacceptable intrusions into the patrimony of specifically human values will be avoided.

5. As far as the right to life is concerned, we must denounce its widespread violation in our society: alongside the victims of armed conflicts, terrorism and the different forms of violence, there are the silent deaths caused by hunger, abortion, experimentation on human embryos and euthanasia. How can we fail to see in all this an attack on peace? Abortion and embryonic experimentation constitute a direct denial of that attitude of acceptance of others which is indispensable for establishing lasting relationships of peace. As far as the free expression of personal faith is concerned, another disturbing symptom of lack of peace in the world is represented by the difficulties that both Christians and the followers of other religions frequently encounter in publicly and freely professing their religious convictions. Speaking of Christians in particular, I must point out with pain that not only are they at times prevented from doing so; in some States they are actually persecuted, and even recently tragic cases of ferocious violence have been recorded. There are regimes that impose a single religion upon everyone, while secular regimes often lead not so much to violent persecution as to systematic cultural denigration of religious beliefs. In both instances, a fundamental human right is not being respected, with serious repercussions for

⁹ No. 3.

¹⁰ *Homily at Islinger Feld, Regensburg, 12 September 2006.*

peaceful coexistence. This can only promote a mentality and culture that is not conducive to peace.

The natural equality of all persons

6. At the origin of many tensions that threaten peace are surely the many unjust inequalities still tragically present in our world. Particularly insidious among these are, on the one hand, inequality in access to essential goods like food, water, shelter, health; on the other hand, there are persistent inequalities between men and women in the exercise of basic human rights.

A fundamental element of building peace is the recognition of the essential equality of human persons springing from their common transcendental dignity. Equality on this level is a good belonging to all, inscribed in that natural “grammar” which is deducible from the divine plan of creation; it is a good that cannot be ignored or scorned without causing serious repercussions which put peace at risk. The extremely grave deprivation afflicting many peoples, especially in Africa, lies at the root of violent reactions and thus inflicts a terrible wound on peace.

7. Similarly, inadequate consideration for the condition of women helps to create instability in the fabric of society. I think of the exploitation of women who are treated as objects, and of the many ways that a lack of respect is shown for their dignity; I also think — in a different context — of the mindset persisting in some cultures, where women are still firmly subordinated to the arbitrary decisions of men, with grave consequences for their personal dignity and for the exercise of their fundamental freedoms. There can be no illusion of a secure peace until these forms of discrimination are also overcome, since they injure the personal dignity impressed by the Creator upon every human being.¹¹

The “ecology of peace”

8. In his Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, Pope John Paul II wrote: “Not only has God given the earth to man, who must use it with respect for the original good purpose for which it was given to him, but man too is God’s gift to man. He must therefore respect the natural and moral structure with which he has been endowed.”¹² By responding to this charge, entrusted to them by the Creator, men and women can join in bringing about a world of peace. Alongside the ecology of nature, there exists what can be called a “human” ecology, which in turn demands a “social” ecology. All this means that humanity, if it truly desires peace, must be increasingly conscious of the links between natural ecology, or respect for nature, and human ecology. Experience shows that disregard for the environment always harms human coexistence, and vice versa. It becomes more and more evident that there is an inseparable link between peace with creation and peace among men. Both of these presuppose peace with God. The poem-prayer of Saint Francis, known as “the Canticle of Brother Sun”, is a wonderful and ever timely example of this multifaceted ecology of peace.

9. The close connection between these two ecologies can be understood from the increasingly serious problem of energy supplies. In recent years, new nations have entered enthusiastically into industrial production, thereby increasing their energy needs. This has led to an unprecedented race for available resources. Meanwhile, some parts of the planet remain backward and development is effectively blocked, partly because of the rise in energy prices. What will happen to those peoples? What kind of development or non-

¹¹ Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the collaboration of men and women in the Church and in the world* (31 May 2004), 15-16.

¹² No. 38.

development will be imposed on them by the scarcity of energy supplies? What injustices and conflicts will be provoked by the race for energy sources? And what will be the reaction of those who are excluded from this race? These are questions that show how respect for nature is closely linked to the need to establish, between individuals and between nations, relationships that are attentive to the dignity of the person and capable of satisfying his or her authentic needs. The destruction of the environment, its improper or selfish use, and the violent hoarding of the earth's resources cause grievances, conflicts and wars, precisely because they are the consequences of an inhumane concept of development. Indeed, if development were limited to the technical-economic aspect, obscuring the moral-religious dimension, it would not be an integral human development, but a one-sided distortion which would end up by unleashing man's destructive capacities.

Reductive visions of man

10. Thus there is an urgent need, even within the framework of current international difficulties and tensions, for a commitment to a human ecology that can favour the growth of the "tree of peace". For this to happen, we must be guided by a vision of the person untainted by ideological and cultural prejudices or by political and economic interests which can instil hatred and violence. It is understandable that visions of man will vary from culture to culture. Yet what cannot be admitted is the cultivation of anthropological conceptions that contain the seeds of hostility and violence. Equally unacceptable are conceptions of God that would encourage intolerance and recourse to violence against others. This is a point which must be clearly reaffirmed: war in God's name is never acceptable! When a certain notion of God is at the origin of criminal acts, it is a sign that that notion has already become an ideology.

11. Today, however, peace is not only threatened by the conflict between reductive visions of man, in other words, between ideologies. It is also threatened by indifference as to what constitutes man's true nature. Many of our contemporaries actually deny the existence of a specific human nature and thus open the door to the most extravagant interpretations of what essentially constitutes a human being. Here too clarity is necessary: a "weak" vision of the person, which would leave room for every conception, even the most bizarre, only apparently favours peace. In reality, it hinders authentic dialogue and opens the way to authoritarian impositions, ultimately leaving the person defenceless and, as a result, easy prey to oppression and violence.

Human rights and international organizations

12. A true and stable peace presupposes respect for human rights. Yet if these rights are grounded on a weak conception of the person, how can they fail to be themselves weakened? Here we can see how profoundly insufficient is a relativistic conception of the person when it comes to justifying and defending his rights. The difficulty in this case is clear: rights are proposed as absolute, yet the foundation on which they are supposed to rest is merely relative. Can we wonder that, faced with the "inconvenient" demands posed by one right or another, someone will come along to question it or determine that it should be set aside? Only if they are grounded in the objective requirements of the nature bestowed on man by the Creator, can the rights attributed to him be affirmed without fear of contradiction. It goes without saying, moreover, that human rights imply corresponding duties. In this regard, Mahatma Gandhi said wisely: "The Ganges of rights flows from the Himalaya of duties." Clarity over these basic presuppositions is needed if human rights, nowadays constantly under attack, are to be adequately defended. Without such clarity, the expression "human rights" will end up being predicated of quite different subjects: in some cases, the human person marked by permanent dignity and rights that are valid always, everywhere and for everyone, in other cases a person with changing dignity and constantly negotiable rights, with regard to content, time and place.

13. The protection of human rights is constantly referred to by international bodies and, in particular, the United Nations Organization, which set itself the fundamental task of promoting the human rights indicated in the 1948 Universal Declaration. That Declaration is regarded as a sort of moral commitment assumed by all mankind. There is a profound truth to this, especially if the rights described in the Declaration are held to be based not simply on the decisions of the assembly that approved them, but on man's very nature and his inalienable dignity as a person created by God. Consequently it is important for international agencies not to lose sight of the natural foundation of human rights. This would enable them to avoid the risk, unfortunately ever-present, of sliding towards a merely positivistic interpretation of those rights. Were that to happen, the international bodies would end up lacking the necessary authority to carry out their role as defenders of the fundamental rights of the person and of peoples, the chief justification for their very existence and activity.

International humanitarian law and the internal law of States

14. The recognition that there exist inalienable human rights connected to our common human nature has led to the establishment of a body of international humanitarian law which States are committed to respect, even in the case of war. Unfortunately, to say nothing of past cases, this has not been consistently implemented in certain recent situations of war. Such, for example, was the case in the conflict that occurred a few months ago in southern Lebanon, where the duty "to protect and help innocent victims" and to avoid involving the civilian population was largely ignored. The heart-rending situation in Lebanon and the new shape of conflicts, especially since the terrorist threat unleashed completely new forms of violence, demand that the international community reaffirm international humanitarian law, and apply it to all present-day situations of armed conflict, including those not currently provided for by international law. Moreover, the scourge of terrorism demands a profound reflection on the ethical limits restricting the use of modern methods of guaranteeing internal security. Increasingly, wars are not declared, especially when they are initiated by terrorist groups determined to attain their ends by any means available. In the face of the disturbing events of recent years, States cannot fail to recognize the need to establish clearer rules to counter effectively the dramatic decline that we are witnessing. War always represents a failure for the international community and a grave loss for humanity. When, despite every effort, war does break out, at least the essential principles of humanity and the basic values of all civil coexistence must be safeguarded; norms of conduct must be established that limit the damage as far as possible and help to alleviate the suffering of civilians and of all the victims of conflicts.¹³

15. Another disturbing issue is the desire recently shown by some States to acquire nuclear weapons. This has heightened even more the widespread climate of uncertainty and fear of a possible atomic catastrophe. We are brought back in time to the profound anxieties of the "cold war" period. When it came to an end, there was hope that the atomic peril had been definitively overcome and that mankind could finally breathe a lasting sigh of relief. How timely, in this regard, is the warning of the *Second Vatican Council* that "every act of war directed to the indiscriminate destruction of whole cities or vast areas with their inhabitants is a crime against God and humanity, which merits firm and unequivocal condemnation."¹⁴ Unfortunately, threatening clouds continue to gather on humanity's horizon. The way to ensure a future of peace for everyone is found not only in international accords for the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, but also in the determined

¹³ In this regard, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* indicates strict and precise criteria: cf. 2307-2317.

¹⁴ Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 80.

commitment to seek their reduction and definitive dismantling. May every attempt be made to arrive through negotiation at the attainment of these objectives! The fate of the whole human family is at stake!

The Church as safeguard of the transcendence of the human person

16. Finally, I wish to make an urgent appeal to the People of God: let every Christian be committed to tireless peace-making and strenuous defence of the dignity of the human person and his inalienable rights.

With gratitude to the Lord for having called him to belong to his Church, which is “the sign and safeguard of the transcendental dimension of the human person”¹⁵ in the world, the Christian will tirelessly implore from God the fundamental good of peace, which is of such primary importance in the life of each person. Moreover, he will be proud to serve the cause of peace with generous devotion, offering help to his brothers and sisters, especially those who, in addition to suffering poverty and need, are also deprived of this precious good. Jesus has revealed to us that “God is love” (1 Jn 4:8) and that the highest vocation of every person is love. In Christ we can find the ultimate reason for becoming staunch champions of human dignity and courageous builders of peace.

17. Let every believer, then, unfailingly contribute to the advancement of a true integral humanism in accordance with the teachings of the Encyclical Letters *Populorum Progressio* and *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, whose respective fortieth and twentieth anniversaries we prepare to celebrate this year. To the Queen of Peace, the Mother of Jesus Christ “our peace” (Eph 2:14), I entrust my urgent prayer for all humanity at the beginning of the year 2007, to which we look with hearts full of hope, notwithstanding the dangers and difficulties that surround us. May Mary show us, in her Son, the Way of peace, and enlighten our vision, so that we can recognize Christ’s face in the face of every human person, the heart of peace!

From the Vatican, 8 December 2006

Benedictus PP. XVI

¹⁵ Ibid., 76.