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## INTERVENTO DEL RAPPRESENTANTE PERMANENTE DELLA SANTA SEDE PRESSO L'ORGANIZZAZIONE DELLE NAZIONI UNITE IN OCCASIONE DELLA 55MA SESSIONE DELL'ASSEMBLEA GENERALE SULLA "CULTURA DELLA PACE"

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Pubblichiamo di seguito l'intervento di S.E. Mons. Renato Martino, Rappresentante Permanente della Santa Sede presso l'Organizzazione delle Nazioni Unite, in occasione della 55ma sessione dell'Assemblea Generale *on item 33 "Culture of Peace"*, svoltasi il 2 novembre 2000:

### ● INTERVENTO DI S.E. MONS. RENATO MARTINO

Mr. President,

The century that has just ended will be remembered as a century of great scientific progress, but also as a one of extraordinary violence. It was a century in which millions of people fell victims to two Great Wars and to innumerable other horrendous wars and internal conflicts, a century of the Holocaust and of repeated genocide, of concentration and extermination camps, of hatred and ethnic cleansing.

The century which begins could yet become one of peace. That must be the hope of this organization, of the community of nations and of all humanity. UNESCO and UNICEF have together proclaimed a "Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World". All must work to make this aspiration a reality.

The Family of Nations must work to make it a reality precisely for the good of all the children of today's world, many of whom have known nothing but war. We must make it a reality in order to give those children and all the children of the new century a new hope and a new future. In reality, it is the children of the world who will make the choice for peace. This generation must put them in a position to do so, through the creation of a true culture of peace.

The first requirement of a culture of peace is to re-affirm the conviction that war is no longer the way to resolve conflicts between nations, or peoples. Pope John Paul II has repeated on many occasions the appeal made by

his predecessor Pope Paul VI here in this General Assembly Hall, "Never again war". In his Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* (n.52), the Pope appealed: "Never again war, which destroys the life of innocent people, teaches how to kill, throws into upheaval even the lives of those who do the killing and leaves behind a trail of resentment and hatred, thus making it all the more difficult to find a just solution to the very problems which provoked the war".

A culture of peace must be a culture of human rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is the fruit of a reflection on the destruction that is the result of war. It is the fruit of reflection of what happens, when the fundamental dignity of each person is overlooked and trampled upon. The recognition of the inalienable rights and dignity of each person represents the foundation of every authentically true free political order.

A culture of peace must be based on truth and justice. Totalitarian regimes compelled entire societies to submit, at least outwardly, to an imposed vision of society. The result was oppression and alienation. A culture of peace focused on the dignity of each person and on the truth about the human person must overturn such a vision. It must respect the conscience of each individual, which is bound only to the truth. It must foster the search for truth. It must respect those who are prepared, even in the face of great pressure and even violence, to witness to the truth, especially when this is done in a spirit of peace. The search for the truth about humankind and the human family must rise above purely utilitarian values, and be open to the full truth about the human person and those fundamental needs of people which cannot be treated as mere commodities. It must overcome the desire for greed and the search for political and economic power which today still remain at the root of many conflicts. Peace between nations presupposes justice and equity in the distribution of the goods of creation.

A culture of peace must be one which respects the rights of nations. So often, at the root of conflicts we find real and grave grievances, based on deep injustice suffered or on the frustration of the legitimate aspirations of peoples. A way must be found to establish a rule of law in international life, just as it has been possible to do so within individual States. Every effort must be made to ensure that timely arbitration is available in areas of conflict, and that a path of dialogue and the hand of friendship can be offered to overcome even deeply rooted conflicts. Conflict prevention must be fostered. Even though it may involve painstaking dialogue and the difficult search for solutions which respect the rights of peoples, prevention and dialogue is the only way to lasting peace.

A culture of peace will reject the logic or the free flow of arms. The upcoming United Nations Conference on Small Arms offers another opportunity to address a long overlooked dimension of international disarmament. The current stock of small arms and the facility with which they can reach areas of conflict pose an enormous challenge to the community of nations. Such a movement of arms greatly increases the possibility of open conflict and widespread loss of life. Concerted efforts must be made at the end of conflicts to collect and to destroy weapons. Efforts must be made to strengthen regional security by fixing mutually agreed ceilings on arms expenditure, in order to reduce the likelihood of the resumption of conflict. In addressing budgetary distortions, the Poverty Reduction Strategies currently being negotiated within the context of debt relief initiatives, must also address excessive military expenditure by already disastrously poor countries. The wealthier nations must be more rigorous in designing and implementing norms which prevent the flow of arms they produce into conflict zones.

A culture of peace will focus on the young, and especially on children. Children are today all too often the first victims of war. Their future is threatened by the breakdown of normal social order, which prevents them from frequenting school or attaining adequate health care. The fundamental protection which international humanitarian law affords to civilian populations must be respected, specially in the case of children. The plague of child soldiers must be removed from our world. How many young lives have been ruined by the forced involvement and abduction of children, robbing them of their innocence and bringing them into face to face contact with violence, even making them the protagonists of violence and killing? Those responsible for the involvement of children in war merit the strongest condemnation by the community of nations.

A culture of peace must begin in human hearts. Violence must be put aside in every aspect of human life. Substituting a culture of war with a culture of non-violence is not an automatic mechanism. It requires a true

change of heart. It must begin in the home and in the family. It must be founded on a true respect of each and every person and of each and every community. A culture of dialogue and respect between communities and civilizations must be fostered.

The world needs men and women who work for reconciliation rather than for war. It needs men and women of vision who can witness to the strength of non violence, which has a more lasting effect than the bitterness which war inevitably engenders. Religious leaders, especially, must appeal to the deepest roots of their message which stresses the fundamental brotherhood of all people and rise above all attempts at the exploitation of religious messages or religious sentiment for political or narrow ethnic motives.

The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace has announced that Catholics will celebrate the World Day of Peace on 1 January 2001 under the theme: "Dialogue between cultures, for a civilization of love and peace". May that become a program for everyone, for the sake of the children of this new century.

Mr. President,

May I conclude by using the words of Pope John Paul II, in his address to this Assembly on the occasion of the celebration of its fiftieth anniversary: "With the help of God's grace, we can build in the next century and the next millennium a civilization worthy of the human person, a true culture of freedom. We can and must do so! And in doing so, we shall see that the tears of this century have prepared the ground for a new springtime of the human spirit".

May the words His Holiness pronounced five years ago translate today into our hope for a true culture of peace.

Thank you, Mr. President.

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