The Holy See

MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II FOR THE 21st WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY

"Social Communications at the Service of Justice and Peace"

[Sunday, 31 May 1987]

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Social communications constitutes a platform of exchange and dialogue which responds to a particular concern of my Pontificate, and that of my Predecessor, Paul VI (cf. *Message to the Special Session of the United Nations on Disarmament*, 24 May 1978, 5): to contribute, in the promotion of peace through justice, to the passage from a balance of terror to a strategy of trust. With some urgency, therefore, I proposed as the theme for World Social Communications Day 1987: "Social Communications at the service of justice and peace". This I have repeated often, but I emphasize it today adding the following trust cannot be the work simply of those involved in politics, but it must come from the conscience of peoples. Having already dealt with the problem of peace (*World Day of Peace 1983*), this year I would like to continue this brief reflection on the work of justice which brings about peace, the strategy of trust as the fulfilment of justice in view of peace.

I know that for you, workers in the field of social communications, the masses are not an anonymous multitude. They represent a continuous challenge to reach each and everyone in their particular context, at their own level of understanding and sensibility, thanks to the ever-more advanced technologies and ever-more effective means of communication. This appeal might resound in your conscience: transmit the strategy of trust through the means of communication, at the service of justice and peace!

To a large extent, your strategy of communication is a plan of information with the aim of

contributing to the building up of this society with the knowledge of what we are doing, no matter what might happen. Allow me to recall what I have already said in this respect: peace in the world depends on a better knowledge of men and communities; the qualified information of public opinion has a direct influence on the promotion of justice and peace (cf. *Message for World Peace Day 1982*, n. 6 and 8). Your task seems to go beyond human possibilities: informing in order to form, while the stream of news carries you to the four corners of the earth, sometimes in a dangerous manner, and without giving you the time to ponder over each case or each event. And therefore, the users of social communications depend on you for understanding the harm of terror and the hopes of trust.

Peace is not possible without dialogue (cf. *Message for World Peace Day 1986*, n. 4-5), but true dialogue cannot be established without being well-informed, in the East and in the West, in the South and in the North. Furthermore, your dialogue wishes to be "'total dialogue", that is, a dialogue established in the context of a global strategy of communications: information, certainly, but also entertainment publicity, artistic creation, education, sensitivity to cultural values. It is through this strategy of communications that the strategy of trust should be realized. From the balance of apprehension, to that of fear, and finally to that of terror, springs a "cold peace"—as Pius XII said— which is not true peace. Only communication can, through true dialogue, bring about a desire and expectancy of a warm peace, seen as a necessity, in the hearts of peoples. And, it could be added, a "cold justice" is not true justice. Justice cannot live if not in trust, otherwise it is simply a "justice against" and not for "justice for" and "justice with" each human person.

How can we link the strategy of trust and the strategy of communication? I would like to develop this theme for reflection. I know that mass-communication is programmed and carefully organized. It is, therefore, important to bring to mind what could be a strategy of trust transmitted by the media. It seems to me that this could comprise seven fundamental aspects: making people aware, denouncing, renouncing, overcoming, contributing, spreading, and affirming.

In the first place, it is necessary to make people aware, or, in other words, to carry out a work of intelligence. Did not Paul VI say that peace is a work of intelligence? It will be necessary, therefore, through the various programmes, to make people aware that every war can lose everything, and that nothing can be lost with peace. For this, the strategy of communications can, better than any other means, make the cause of war understood: the innumerable injustices which stimulate violence. Every injustice can lead to war.

Violence is in us, we must free ourselves of it to discover peace. Such is the work of justice which is carried out as a fruit of intelligence. Intelligence, according to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council (cf. *Gaudium et Spes* n. 82-91), expresses itself above all through the positive choices suggested by questions of justice and peace, in the face of injustice and war. And it is precisely here that your role becomes interesting, due to the spirit of initiative which it bears.

Communicating the constructive choices of justice and peace goes hand in hand with your duty to denounce all causes of violence and conflict: generalized armaments, commerce of arms, oppression and torture, terrorism of every kind, over-militarization and an exaggerated concern for national security, North-South tension, and all forms of domination, occupation, repression, exploitation and discrimination.

To denounce in a coherent way, you must renounce yourself the roots of violence and injustice. One of the images most firmly integrated into the production of means of communication seems to be the "ideal of the strongest, this desire for supremacy which does nothing but increase mutual fear. Along the lines of what John XXIII affirmed, it is necessary to arrive, in your production, at a "disarmament of spirits" (Cf. *Address to Journalists at the Council*, 13 October 1962). What could be the progress of exchanges in communication, if the market was amply supplied with programmes which present things entirely different from this will for domination which is the inspiration for so many works in circulation at the moment! And what improvement in quality could be obtained if the users through their requests and reactions, could renounce the idea of the strongest! To act in a spirit of justice, it is not enough to "act against" in the name of a hardened force. Rather it is necessary to "act through and with" others, or, in the world of the media, to communicate through and with each one.

The strategy of trust also signifies overcoming all the obstacles to the "works of justice" in view of peace. In the first place, it is necessary to overcome the barriers of mistrust. What better than social communications can overcome all the barriers of race, class, and culture which confront each other? Mistrust can be born from all forms of partiality and social, political or religious intolerance. Mistrust feeds on the discouragement which becomes defeatism. Trust, on the other hand, is the fruit of a more rigorous ethical attitude at all levels of daily life. Pope John XXIII recalled that it was necessary at all costs to overcome the imbalance between the technical possibilities and ethical commitment of the human community.

And you, both workers and users of social communications, you know well that the world of communications is an exploding world of technological progress. Even in this advanced sector of human experience, the ethical need is the most urgent at all levels.

Your role, furthermore, is that of contributing to making peace possible through justice. Information is the way of awareness, of verification, of controlling the reality of facts on the paths of peace. This contribution can be deepened by debates and public discussions within the media. It is perhaps at this level that your imagination will be put to its hardest test. And it is precisely here that the users' answer is most necessary.

We must not then forget the task of spreading with some insistence all that can help to make peace and justice understood and lived, right from the most humble initiatives at the service of peace and justice up to the efforts of international meetings. Among these initiatives, the role of a

new world information and communications order, at the service of peace and justice, and with the guarantee of widespread information in favour of all, certainly occupies an important place, as I have already mentioned on the occasion of one of the congresses of the International Union of the Catholic Press (cf. *Address to the UCIP*, 25 September 1980). Your role as those responsible for social communications is one of continual education. As users of social communications, your duty is one of continual research for access to all data which can form your opinions and make you ever-more aware of your responsibilities. We are all responsible for the destiny of justice and peace.

In the midst of all the initiatives which you must spread, allow me to ask you with some insistence not to ignore the presentation of the Christian idea of peace and justice, the Christian message of peace and justice, without forgetting exhortations to commitment, but also to prayer for peace: irreplaceable dimensions of the ecclesial contributions to peace initiatives and in favour of efforts to live in justice.

These things you already know, as suggested by the presentation, through the means of social communication, of the true and complete image of the human person, foundation of every reference to justice and peace. Anything that wounds the person is already "an act of war" in its beginning. Therefore what incalculable consequences each of these communications' initiatives, of which you are the animators, will have!

In spreading these things, it is necessary finally to affirm all preliminary conditions in view of justice and peace: the inalienable rights of the human person, equal fundamental liberties in view of the participation of all in the common good, respect for legitimate sovereignty, the duties of indemnity and aid... But above all, we must shed light on the values of life: existence no longer seen as relentlessly engaged in a "struggle for life", but life lived with the intelligence of wisdom, in goodness, or again, love as a source and ideal of life. Only love, re-discovering fraternity every day, can definitively defeat terror. May love, inspired by the gift of God, act on these "marvellous techniques" of communication, which are also "gifts of God" (cf. *Miranda prorsus*)!

In the hope that these words will help you never to lose sight of justice and peace, as you, workers in social communications, begin to carry out your programmes, and as you, the users, listen and respond, I give you all my trust and ask you all to work for trust at the service of the whole of humanity. In this spirit, I impart to you with joy my Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 24 January 1987, the Feast of Saint Francis de Sales

IOANNES PAULUS PP. II

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