



# The Holy See

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**MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER FRANCIS  
TO PARTICIPANTS AT THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE  
"HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD:  
ACHIEVEMENTS, OMISSIONS, NEGATIONS"**

[ROME, 10-11 DECEMBER 2018]

*Dear Cardinal,*

*Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I am pleased to send my cordial greeting to all of you, Representatives of States to the Holy See, of the Institutions of the United Nations, of the Council of Europe, of the Episcopal Commissions for Justice and Peace and of those for social ministry, of the academic world and of organizations of civil society, convened in Rome for the International Conference on the theme “Human Rights in the Contemporary World: Achievements, Omissions, Negations”, promoted by the [Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development](#) and by the Pontifical Gregorian University, on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and of the 25th anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action.

Through these two documents, the family of Nations sought to recognize the equal dignity of every human being,<sup>[1]</sup> from which derive the fundamental rights and liberties that, as they are rooted in human nature — the inseparable unity of body and soul — are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interconnected.<sup>[2]</sup> At the same time, the 1948 Declaration recognizes that “Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible”.<sup>[3]</sup>

In the year in which significant anniversaries of these international juridical instruments are being celebrated, an in-depth reflection on the foundation and the respect for human rights in the contemporary world seems timely, a reflection which I hope may herald a renewed commitment in favour of the defence of human dignity, with special attention to the most vulnerable members of

the community.

Indeed, by closely observing our contemporary societies, one observes numerous contradictions that lead one to wonder whether the equal dignity of all human beings, solemnly proclaimed 70 years ago, is truly recognized, respected, protected and promoted in every circumstance. In the world today numerous forms of injustice persist, fed by reductive anthropological visions and by a profit-based economic model, which does not hesitate to exploit, discard and even kill human beings.[4] While one part of humanity lives in opulence, another part sees its own dignity denied, scorned or trampled upon, and its fundamental rights disregarded or violated.

I think, among other things, of the unborn, who are denied the right to come into the world; of those who do not have access to the indispensable means for a dignified life;[5] of those who are excluded from an appropriate education; of those who are unjustly deprived of work or compelled to work as slaves; of those who are detained in inhumane conditions, who suffer torture or who are denied the opportunity for redemption;[6] of the victims of forced disappearances and of their families.

My thought also goes to all those who are living in a climate dominated by suspicion and scorn, who are the object of acts of intolerance, discrimination and violence due to their race, ethnicity, nationality or religion.[7]

Lastly, I cannot fail to recall those who endure a multitude of violations of their fundamental rights in the tragic context of armed conflicts, while unscrupulous dealers of death[8] enrich themselves at the cost of their brothers' and sisters' blood.

Faced with these grave phenomena, we are all accountable. Indeed, when fundamental rights are violated, or when some are favoured to the detriment of others, or when they are guaranteed only to specified groups, then serious injustices occur, which in their turn feed conflicts with heavy consequences both within single Nations and in relations among them.

Therefore, each person is called to contribute with courage and determination, in line with the specificity of his or her proper role, to the respect of the fundamental rights of every person, especially of those who are 'invisible': of the many who are hungry and thirsty, who are naked, sick, strangers or prisoners (cf. Mt 25:35-35), who live at the margins of society or who are discarded from it.

This demand for justice and solidarity assumes a special significance for us Christians, because the Gospel itself invites us to direct our gaze toward the least of our brothers and sisters, to be moved with compassion (cf. Mt 14:14) and to commit ourselves concretely in order to alleviate their suffering.

I would like, on this occasion, to address a heartfelt appeal to those who have institutional responsibilities, asking them to place human rights at the centre of all policies, including those of cooperating in development, even when this means going against the current.

With the hope that these days of reflection may awaken consciences and inspire initiatives aimed at protecting and promoting human dignity, I entrust each of you, your families and your peoples to the intercession of Mary Most Holy, Queen of Peace, and I invoke upon all of you an abundance of divine blessings.

*From the Vatican, 10 December 2018*

**Francis**

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[1] Cf. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 10 December 1948, Preamble and Article 1.

[2] Cf. *Vienna Declaration*, 25 June 1993, n. 5.

[3] *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, art. 29.1.

[4] Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 53.

[5] Cf. John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris*, 11 April, 1963.

[6] Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2267.

[7] Cf. *Address to Participants at the World Conference on “Xenophobia, Racism and Populist Nationalism in the Context of Global Migration”*, 20 September 2018.

[8] Cf. *General Audience*, Saint Peter’s Square, 11 June 2014.

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