

1987

Encyclical Letter

**SOLLICITUDO REI SOCIALIS**

*John Paul II*

*(Excerpts)*

30 December 1987

15. However, the picture just given would be incomplete if one failed to add to the “economic and social indices” of underdevelopment other indices which are equally negative and indeed even more disturbing, beginning with the cultural level. These are illiteracy, the difficulty or impossibility of obtaining higher education, the inability to share in the building of one’s own nation, the various forms of exploitation and of economic, social, political and even religious oppression of the individual and his or her rights, discrimination of every type, especially the exceptionally odious form based on difference of race. If some of these scourges are noted with regret in areas of the more developed North, they are undoubtedly more frequent, more lasting and more difficult to root out in the developing and less advanced countries.

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It should be noted that in today’s world, among other rights, the right of economic initiative is often suppressed. Yet it is a right which is important not only for the individual but also for the common good. Experience shows us that the denial of this right, or its limitation in the name of an alleged “equality” of everyone in society, diminishes, or in practice absolutely destroys the spirit of initiative, that is to say the creative subjectivity of the citizen. As a consequence, there arises, not so much a true equality as a “leveling down.” In the place of creative initiative there appears passivity, dependence and submission to the bureaucratic apparatus which, as the only “ordering” and “decision-making” body - if not also the “owner”- of the entire totality of goods and the means of production, puts everyone in a position of almost absolute dependence, which is similar to the traditional dependence of the worker-proletarian in capitalism. This provokes a sense of frustration or desperation and predisposes people to opt out of national life, impelling many to emigrate and also favoring a form of “psychological” emigration.

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24. If arms production is a serious disorder in the present world with regard to true human needs and the employment of the means capable of satisfying those needs, the arms trade is equally to blame. Indeed, with reference to the latter it must be added that the moral judgment is even more severe. As we all know, this is a trade without frontiers capable of crossing even the barriers of the blocs. It knows how to overcome the division between East and West, and above all the one between North and South, to the point - and this is more serious - of pushing its way into the different sections which make up the southern hemisphere. We are thus confronted with a strange phenomenon: while economic aid and development plans meet with the obstacle of insuperable ideological barriers, and with tariff and trade barriers, arms of whatever origin circulate with almost total freedom all over the world And as the recent document of the Pontifical Commission *Iustitia et Pax* on the international debt points out,<sup>42</sup> everyone

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knows that in certain cases the capital lent by the developed world has been used in the underdeveloped world to buy weapons.

If to all this we add the tremendous and universally acknowledged danger represented by atomic weapons stockpiled on an incredible scale, the logical conclusion seems to be this: in today's world, including the world of economics, the prevailing picture is one destined to lead us more quickly towards death rather than one of concern for true development which would lead all towards a "more human" life, as envisaged by the Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*.<sup>43</sup> [114 2]

The consequences of this state of affairs are to be seen in the festering of a wound which typifies and reveals the imbalances and conflicts of the modern world: the millions of refugees whom war, natural calamities, persecution and discrimination of every kind have deprived of home, employment, family and homeland. The tragedy of these multitudes is reflected in the hopeless faces of men, women and children who can no longer find a home in a divided and inhospitable world. [114 3]

42 *At the Service of the Human Community: An Ethical Approach to the International Debt Question* (December 27, 1986), III, 2, 1.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. *Encyclical Letter Populorum Progressio*, nn. 20-21: *loc. cit.*, pp. 267f.

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Source: *Excerpts from the Encyclical "Sollicitudo Rei Socialis" (John Paul II)*.

Available from Vatican's

website: [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jpii\\_enc\\_30121987\\_sollicitudo-rei-socialis\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jpii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis_en.html).

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