

Message Announced by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan
"Respect Human Rights Of All"

To Our Brothers and Sisters in the Church of Japan

<Introduction>

On December 10 1948 in the 3rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights¹ was adopted reflecting on the fact that a great number of precious human lives were taken away during the two previous world wars. It was confirmed by this declaration that the respect for rights of each and every person and all the ethnic groups alike is precisely the basis of peace. Human rights, however, have been violated both at home and abroad even now after 60 years from the adoption of this declaration. Looking at this reality, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan reconfirms the universal value of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and appeals anew to establish a society based on respect for human rights.

<Respect All People>

In Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights it is stipulated that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights"², which is the declaration that each and every person in the world is irreplaceable without exception. From the teaching of the Bible³, we believe that God created every human in his image, and "the dignity of human beings is bestowed by God – not created by human society, that it pertains universally, and that no one must violate it"⁴.

<Human Rights Are Faced With A New Critical Phase>

Despite many people's efforts to protect and promote human rights for the past 60 years since the adoption of the Declaration, however, there seems to be no end to human rights violations. Additionally, the issues behind the incidents have become more serious so that mankind is faced with unprecedented realities on a global scale.

Because of "unequal distribution of the means of subsistence originally meant for everybody, and thus also an unequal distribution of the benefits deriving from them"⁵, the inequalities have widened⁶. The sense of value based on market fundamentalism, being prevalent in the modern world, has deepened inequality even more and made human rights violations more structural because it gives priority to acquisition of benefits over the promotion of common good. This market fundamentalism also has serious consequences in environmental issues. In addition to the droughts and floods due to climate change⁷, fuel

and food prices have risen sharply⁸ and water resources have been privatized⁹. These issues deal a further blow to a wider range of people than ever before, especially the poor.

If we overlook this reality without taking any measures to address it, it is obvious that there will be an increasing number of poor people whose survival will be threatened. If individuals, enterprises and nations keep pursuing their own interests, human dignity will be trampled on and the world will become a more violent and distorted place, where “the victims of hardship and despair, whose human dignity is violated with impunity, become easy prey to the call to violence, and they can then become violators of peace”¹⁰. These circumstances must be changed as soon as possible. We cannot waste any more time. We would like to demand “ a world, ruled by concern for the common good of all humanity instead of by the quest for individual profit”¹¹. To that end, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the vital standards that the world should have already embraced, must be reaffirmed and put into practice in every field.

<Approaches To Protect And Promote Human Rights>

An offense against the human rights of one person is an offense against humanity itself¹². The late Pope John Paul II said, “I would however like to emphasize that no human right is safe if we fail to commit ourselves to safeguarding all of them. When the violation of any fundamental human right is accepted without reaction, all other rights are placed at risk. It is therefore essential that there should be a global approach to the subject of human rights and a serious commitment to defend them”¹³.

In addition, not only individuals but also nations and the international community bear the responsibility to protect human rights. Regarding the nations’ responsibility Pope Benedict XVI mentioned, “Every State has the primary duty to protect its own population from grave and sustained violations of human rights, as well as from the consequences of humanitarian crises, whether natural or man-made”¹⁴.

In order to overcome today’s critical situation, all of its causes must patiently be eliminated one by one. For that purpose, we must look at the world standing on the side of those who are relegated to poor and vulnerable positions, who are cut off from crucial human relations, or whose human life is damaged or disturbed. If we do not take the viewpoint of those who are marginalized, then even if without malicious intention, we will end up standing on the side of those saying that a certain degree of human rights violations are unavoidable. That will never lead to solutions to the human rights issues.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us pray and work at every occasion in order to realize a society where everyone can live proactively, live a life with human dignity, and restore ties with others, as “the promotion of human rights is a task which follows from love of the human person”¹⁵ and “the most effective strategy for eliminating inequalities between countries and social groups, and for increasing security”¹⁶. “When we respect human dignity and human rights together as a single whole, the good of both the person and society will be promoted unambiguously”¹⁷.

December 10, 2008

On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Japan

¹ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the official name.

² Cf. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 1.

³ “God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:27)

“The LORD God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being.”(Genesis 2:7)

“What is man that you should be mindful of him; or the son of man that you should care for him? You have made him little less than the angels,,,” (Psalms 8:5-6)

⁴ Cf. Peace Message After 60 Years From the End of World War II, The Road To Peace Based On Nonviolence, Now Is The Time To Be Prophetic. Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Japan, Annual Ten Days for Peace 2005.

⁵ Cf. Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* of Pope John Paul II, n9. (December 30,1987)

⁶ Cf. United Nations Economic and Social Council, Report on World Social Situation Finds “Much of World Trapped In Inequality Predicament.” (<http://www.unic.or.jp/new/pr05-074-J.htm>)

⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 2007/2008, “Fighting Climate Change: Human Solidarity in a Divided World.” (<http://www.undp.or.jp/hdr/pdf/release/2007-2008.pdf>)

⁸ Cf. Food and Agriculture Organization, Global Information and Early Warning System Homepage, Regional Food Price Update. (<http://www.fao.org/giews/english/ewi/cerealprice/4.htm>)

⁹ Cf. United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Report 2006 “Beyond Scarcity: Power, Poverty, and the Global Water Crisis.” (http://www.undp.or.jp/publications/pdf/undp_hdr2006.pdf) Privatization of water systems is globally underway at a fair speed as indicated in the Human Development Report 2006, “The vast majority of the poor are already purchasing their water in private markets. These markets deliver water of variable quality at high prices.”

¹⁰ Cf. Address of Pope Benedict XVI to the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization. (April 18, 2008)

¹¹ Cf. Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* of Pope John Paul II, n10. (December 30,1987)

¹² Cf. Pope John Paul II, Message for World Day for Peace, 2000, “an offense against human rights is an offense against the conscience of humanity as such, an offense against humanity itself.”

¹³ *Ibid.* , 1999

¹⁴ Address of Pope Benedict XVI to the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization. (April 18, 2008)

¹⁵ Cf. Pope John Paul II, Message for World Day for Peace, 1998.

¹⁶ Address of Pope Benedict XVI to the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization. (April 18, 2008)

¹⁷ Cf. Pope John Paul II, Message for World Day for Peace, 1999.