



**Message of His Holiness Pope Francis
delivered by His Eminence, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State,
on the occasion of the 2023 World of Work Summit
"Global Coalition for Social Justice: Social Justice for All"**

ILO - Geneva, 14 June 2023

Mr. Director General,
Mr. President of the International Labour Conference,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of His Holiness Pope Francis, I thank the International Labour Organization for inviting the Holy See to address this World of Work Summit and extend my cordial greetings to all gathered here today for the official launch of the *Global Coalition for Social Justice*. This laudable initiative holds a very special interest to the Holy See, since it resonates deeply with the indications, counsels, and exhortations by which the Catholic Church encourages her faithful to be responsible citizens. In this regard, it is noteworthy that the term “*social justice*” was first used in the 19th century by Catholic philosophers and theologians with the intent of overcoming the poor conditions of industrial labourers who languished in inhumane misery.

Although the world has largely changed since then, the Holy See remains committed to supporting any efforts to promote social justice, especially in the workplace, by making her means available to the international community and, above all, by sharing the social doctrine of the Church.

More precisely, considering the current geo-political scenario, characterised by many conflicts and instabilities, the Holy See wishes that the *Global Coalition for Social Justice* could contribute to furthering the cause of peace. Indeed, the common thread linking the teaching of the Church confirms that “commitment to justice must be closely linked with commitment to peace in the modern world”¹. This affirmation is particularly meaningful on the sixtieth anniversary of the Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris*, by which Pope St. John XXIII appealed to a peace “that is founded on truth, built up on justice, nurtured and animated by charity, and brought into effect under the auspices of freedom”².

¹ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Laborem Exercens*, 2.

² JOHN XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris*, 167.

Unfortunately, this vision of peace sustained by social justice for all still seems utopian in the face of millions of “weak and defenceless beings who are frequently at the mercy of economic interests or indiscriminate exploitation”³. Let us think of the huge numbers of people who are unemployed or under-employed and countless multitudes of people suffering from hunger, low-skilled workers, day labourers, those who work in the informal sector, migrant and refugee workers, those who perform what are commonly referred to as ‘3Ds occupations’: dangerous, dirty and degrading, and the list could go on⁴. These people in vulnerable situations are often exploited and their human dignity relentlessly trampled upon.

The Church is well aware that in her dialogue with the State and with society, she does not have solutions for every particular issue, but she remains committed to continue proclaiming “the Gospel of peace” (*Eph* 6:15) and to cooperate with all national and international authorities in safeguarding this immense universal good⁵, the gift of peace nurtured by true social justice.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

“The pandemic shed light on the risks and consequences inherent in a way of life dominated by selfishness and a culture of waste, and it set before us a choice: either to continue on the road we have followed until now, or to set out on a new path”⁶. It is therefore crucial that those on the margins of the labour market are always held at the forefront of our hearts and minds during any political discussions on social justice. The reality of their experiences must shape our thoughts and actions. And of even greater importance is their inclusion as full and active participants in any decisions we take to reach a more secure peace within our societies. In practice, the search for social justice “demands that we fight against the causes of poverty: inequality and the lack of labour, land, and lodging; against those who deny social and labour rights; and against the culture that leads to taking away the dignity of others”⁷.

To this end, it is of the utmost importance that we do not succumb to a reductionist conception of social justice that focuses solely on economic and social indicators. Rather, it should rest on the threefold cornerstones of ‘*human dignity*’, ‘*solidarity*’, and ‘*subsidiarity*’.

Pope St. John Paul II said, the “guiding principle [...] of all of the Church’s social doctrine, is a correct view of the human person and of his unique value [...]. God has imprinted his own image and likeness on man (*cf.* Gen 1:26), conferring upon him an incomparable dignity [...]. In effect, beyond the rights which man acquires by his own work,

³ FRANCIS, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 215.

⁴ *Cf.* FRANCIS, *Video Message on the occasion of the 109th meeting of the International Labour Organization*, 17 June 2021.

⁵ *Cf.* FRANCIS, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 241; 239.

⁶ FRANCIS, *Address to members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See*, 8 February 2021.

⁷ Tweet @Pontifex, 20 February 2023 (*World Day of Social Justice*).

there exist rights which do not correspond to any work he performs, but which flow from his essential dignity as a person”⁸. This fundamental cornerstone calls for the protection of the fundamental rights and well-being of all individuals, including their physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. It demands that individuals and societies respect the inherent dignity of every person, from conception to natural death, and work towards creating a society that upholds and promotes the dignity of all.

Second, solidarity is the principle that emphasizes the interconnectedness and interdependence of all people. It is the fabric for authentic relationships and calls for a sense of responsibility and care for one another, particularly for those who are marginalized, vulnerable, or experiencing injustice. Solidarity urges individuals and communities to recognize that their well-being is intertwined with the well-being of others, and to work towards the common good by promoting justice, equality, and human rights for all. It involves actively standing with and advocating for those who face discrimination, poverty, violence, or injustice.

The last of the threefold cornerstones is subsidiarity, which is the principle that guides the appropriate distribution of power and decision-making. Subsidiarity encourages individuals and communities to have the freedom to make decisions that affect their lives, while larger institutions and authorities provide support and assistance when necessary. It seeks to prevent the concentration of power and supports the empowerment and participation of individuals and communities in shaping their own destiny.

It is only when these three principles of ‘*human dignity*’, ‘*solidarity*’, and ‘*subsidiarity*’ work in synergy that the common good prevails and that we can make our world a just and compassionate one, in which “*social justice*” can truly flourish “*for all*”.

Thank you for your attention.

⁸ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, 11.