



Department of Social Development and World Peace
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Ethical Declaration against Corruption

Santiago, Chile - May 22, 1997

Called together by the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM) and in collaboration with the Interdisciplinary Studies Center on Latin American Development (CIEDLA), a group of bishops representing the majority of the episcopal conferences of Latin America and the Caribbean have come together in Santiago de Chile from 19 to 22 May, 1997 to analyze the reality of public and private corruption in our countries.

With the participation of experts on the theme, we have reflected on the causes of, and the initiatives which have been undertaken to combat corruption. On concluding this seminar, we have desired to raise up a call that all of us commit ourselves to examine our own responsibility to face up to this dead weight which condemns us to an ethical underdevelopment.

1. On the threshold of the Third Millennium, and responding to the call of our Holy Father John Paul II, we wish to *contribute to the building of a just and solidary society* in our continent.
2. The *authentic progress* of our peoples is measured by *equity in the distribution of social well-being*, and by *equality of opportunities and quality of life* for all people, which is the result of an attitude and practice of solidarity that expresses concern for everyone, especially the poorest and most marginalized.
3. In our Latin American countries, the *dominant culture* is one that is marked by increasing individualism, consumerism, the dominance of the market, a weak public commitment, a certain political mindset that dispenses with an ethical value system, the seeking for power and an excessive desire for material goods at any cost, all of which are sources of corruption. We find this associated with obtaining benefits by using the influence gotten through public office or private wealth, generating unlawful enrichment.
4. Corruption *exact a cost in the lives of our peoples* because it casts strong suspicion about the efficiency of public works, produces a greater fiscal deficit, and distorts the distributive role of the state. Corruption in public life causes *systematic*

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distrust in the institutions of the state which leads people to disregard them and seek one's benefits by other means. And although there is no direct connection between power and corruption. It is obvious to all that, with power, the possibilities of exercising it multiply due to the position one holds or because of the power that money in fact confers in society. Thus we have the paradox that corruption *is more likely among those who are less subject to sanction.*

5. Corruption at the public level is *an injustice* because it indicates the abuse of a social function and the misuse of resources, thus constituting a genuine *theft*. It is urgent that we react against both the public and private corruption which is bringing destruction on our peoples, oppressing the poor still more, and contributing to the enrichment of a few.

6. Thus we invite all the Christians of our Latin American countries to *live lives consistent with our faith in Jesus Christ*, Savior of the world, and be the first resolutely to reject corruption. It is unworthy of us to sell ourselves in order to *have more goods*. Only in solidarity can we build a society with room for all. Integrity is essential since, by exercising it, each one discovers his own dignity as well as that of the rest.

7. We are concerned about the gap that exists between the faith that we profess and the values that we live. Consequently, we express publicly our deep conviction that the first step in overcoming corruption is taking on a *simple and austere* style of life consistent with the Gospel which we profess, and understanding every public responsibility as a *service to the community*. Without the personal commitment to *the truth* on the part of each Latin American citizen, especially the youth, laws will lack justice and even the just ones will prove inefficient.

8. The school of authentic values which are learned in the bosom of *the family* and developed through *education* prepares the path for building a society that progresses in the hope of an equitable and worthy manner for all.

9. In proclaiming our faith in Jesus Christ, Son of God, we express the certainty that *only in truth and in justice, in freedom and in solidarity*, can a future worthy of all the citizens of our countries be begun. *They live in the presence of God who act with justice and accept no bribe* (cf. Ps 15).

10 We appeal to the builders of the society, and in particular to *those responsible for the mass media*, to join in our commitment to sow true Christian values and banish corruption from the life of our peoples.

Signing this declaration on May 22, 1997 were the following:

President and Mrs. Eduardo Frei of Chile
 Cardinal Carlos Ovicdo of Santiago
 Cardinal Augusto Vargas Alzamora, S.J. of Lima
 Cardinal Nicolás de Jesús López Rodríguez of Santo Domingo
 Archbishop Oscar Andrés Rodríguez, S.D.B. of Tegucigalpa; President of CEI.AM
 Archbishop Luciano Mendes de Almeida, S.J. of Mariana; Vice President of CELAM
 Bishop Jorge Jiménez Carvajal, General Secretary of CELAM
 Archbishop Estanislao Esteban Karlic, President of Argentine Episcopal Conference
 Bishop Jaime Chemello, Vice President of Brazilian Episcopal Conference
 Archbishop Juan Francisco Sarasti, Vice President of Colombian Episcopal Conference
 Archbishop Román Arrieta Villalobos, President of Costa Rican Episcopal Conference
 Msgr. Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, Vicar General of Havana Archdiocese
 Bishop Vicente Cisneros, Vice President of Ecuador Episcopal Conference
 Archbishop Sergio Obeso, President of Mexican Episcopal Conference
 Archbishop José Dimas Cedeño, President of Panama Episcopal Conference
 Bishop Oscar Páez Garcete, President of Paraguay Episcopal Conference
 Bishop Orlando Romero Cabrera, President of Uruguay Episcopal Conference
 Archbishop Baltazar Porras, President of Venezuela Episcopal Conference

In addition, some forty other prominent churchmen, political figures, academics, and foundation executives participated in the seminar and signed the statement.