

Never has the world been richer, yet never has there been so many poor people, and never have inequalities widened so much as to exceed the limit beyond which an unmanageable imbalance appears. If 1% of the world's population possesses 46% of the available resources, if 10% possesses 80% and 50% - half the world's population - possesses nothing, how can the coexistence among peoples hold? Isn't peace in danger if 70 million people have the same wealth in their hands that the remaining eight billion possess? Won't the billion people living in 'absolute poverty' – in the most economically backward countries, about half of whom are in South Asia, a third in sub-Saharan Africa, and a significant share in Latin America - sooner or later make their despair felt? I won't go any further in rattling off numbers, I will only say that behind the numbers are the faces of women, men and children exploited for vile interests, crushed by the perverse logic of power and money.... They are a vast population suffering from subhuman living conditions; all innocent victims of situations that the world political order is unable to regulate: they are the 'waste' that nobody wants.

Among the causes of these imbalances is the policy of the great powers that favours the implementation of complex strategies in which mercantilist competition among Countries, economic regionalism and sectoral protectionism overlap. In rich countries, the globalisation process has undermined the structures of the *welfare state* by fostering the development of elitist and repressive oligarchies. The obsession with economic and financial efficiency benefits the ruling classes and leads to discrimination against the underprivileged, especially against migrants, who are treated as 'invading barbarians.' In this context, the globalisation process further aggravates the social imbalances left unresolved by the *welfare state*. In fact, global competition imposes competition especially in the weaker productive sectors, starting with the labour force. Employed work is now scarce, precarious, segmented, and poorly paid. It is easy to move from this scenario to violent consequences.

The United Nations that set the eradication of poverty as one of its Millennium goals, are belied by the facts: the goal has not only not been achieved, but the inequality gap has widened even further. Obviously it is not enough to say that the total wealth has grown if the areas of marginalisation and exclusion from life both within individual countries and between areas of the world dramatically increase.

We must hope and work so that a different world is possible! And part of this vision also passes through a redefinition of the 'common good'. Dramatic inequalities are not the result of chance, but the bitter fruit of exasperated capitalism that has generated a hyper-individualist culture. Such culture is undermining the push towards unity at its root, thus shattering the 'we' that is central to the common good for peaceful coexistence and a good life for all peoples. A dramatic consequence of the collapse of the "we" is seen in the numerous wars underway in the world: 59. And we are all aware that wars are a heartbreak for the common good. We might say the opposite: they are the common evil. They produce victims by the million and cause all forms of poverty.

I am particularly pleased to welcome among us the two distinguished speakers who will offer us their valuable reflections on the theme of the common good. And I am particularly delighted to read the message that Pope Francis sent us for this occasion.