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UDIENZA AI MEMBRI DELLA FÉDÉRATION INTERNATIONALE DE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION (FIFA)

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Alle 11.15 di questa mattina, nella Sala Clementina del Palazzo Apostolico Vaticano, il Santo Padre Giovanni Paolo II ha ricevuto in Udienza i Membri della Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) ed ha loro rivolto il discorso che pubblichiamo di seguito:

• **DISCORSO DEL SANTO PADRE**

Mr President,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

With great pleasure I welcome you this morning on the occasion of the Executive Committee Meeting of FIFA. I greet the President Mr Joseph Sepp Blatter and his Vice-Presidents, the Secretary-General Mr Michel Zen-Ruffinen, the Presidents of the International Confederations, and all of you who are responsible for overseeing the world of football, a truly universal task.

Football is indeed a world-wide sport, and this is now more evident than ever, given the massive level of popular interest and media coverage which the sport receives. Yours is a global responsibility, with more than two hundred countries and one hundred and twenty million players involved in your Association. An immense power lies in your hands, and it must be used for the good of the human family.

You are administrators certainly; but you are educators as well, since sport can effectively inculcate many higher values, such as loyalty, friendship and team-spirit. It is especially important to keep this in mind at a time when football has also become as it were a global industry. It is true that football's financial success can help to sustain praiseworthy new initiatives, such as FIFA's "Charity Project". But it can also contribute to a culture of selfishness and greed. That is why the finer values of sport must be emphasized and passed on through the bodies represented in your Federation.

As a sport shared by people of different ethnic, racial, economic and social backgrounds, football is an excellent means of promoting the solidarity so greatly needed in a world deeply affected by ethnic and racial tensions. FIFA's "Fair Play Campaign" is a positive sign that you are eager to do your part in using sport to build a climate of respect and understanding between people.

Sport is educational, because it takes human impulses, even potentially negative ones, and turns them to good purpose. The young learn to have healthy competition without conflict. They learn that they can enter an arena in which their opponent is not their enemy. For this reason, I express the earnest hope that FIFA will continue at all levels to tackle the problem of violence, which does so much harm to the game.

In fact, for all its importance as an education for the great challenges of life, football remains a game. It is a form of play, both simple and complex, in which people take joy in the wonderful possibilities of human life B physical, social and spiritual. It would be a sad day if the spirit of play and the sense of joy in fair competition were to be lost. You are the guardians of the true spirit of the game. You have taken as your motto the words "For the Good of the Game". Have no doubt, the good of the game can also be an important part of the good of the world! As a pledge that the Almighty is with you in this task, I invoke upon you and those whom you represent the divine gifts of peace and joy. God bless you all!

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