



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. Mr WESLEY MOMO JOHNSON
NEW AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA
TO THE HOLY SEE****

Thursday, 29 May 2008

Your Excellency,

I am pleased to welcome you to the Vatican and to accept the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Liberia to the Holy See. I would like to express my gratitude for the good wishes that you bring from your President, Mrs Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf. Please convey to Her Excellency my cordial greetings and assure her of my continued prayers for all the people of your nation.

Let me assure you, Mr Ambassador, that the Holy See values its diplomatic links with your country, and looks forward to developing them further in the years ahead. As the international community strives to fulfil its humanitarian obligations towards the people of Africa, the Holy See regards with particular concern the many citizens of Liberia who were left destitute by the violent conflict that ravaged your country for so many years. After two years of stable elected government, significant progress has been made in the immense task of reconstruction. It was with satisfaction that I learned of the decision by the International Monetary Fund last November to take steps towards cancelling Liberia's debt. This is good news indeed, and it is greatly to be hoped that recent signs of economic growth will be sustained in the years to come. After decades of war and instability, the people of your country deserve to be delivered from the poverty, food insecurity, and unemployment that have afflicted them for so long.

I am sure your people realize that a peaceful and prosperous future can only be attained if a serious attempt is made to acknowledge past failures and to heal the wounds inflicted in the course of the civil war. The "truth and reconciliation process" in Liberia, as in other African

countries, is a courageous and necessary step along the path to national renewal, and if it is pursued with integrity and determination, it can only lead to a strengthening of the values on which civilized society depends. When the people of a nation have witnessed violence, mismanagement and corruption, practised with impunity at the highest levels of society, it is not easy to regain trust in the machinery of government. Indeed, it is tempting to withdraw from national life altogether, seeking only to promote one's particular interests or those of one's region or ethnic group. Such partisan attitudes must be overcome by a renewed commitment to promote the common good of all citizens, a profound respect for all members of society, irrespective of ethnic origin or political allegiance, and a willingness to contribute one's own gifts and resources so as to bring about the greater well-being and prosperity of others.

In my World Day of Peace Message at the start of this year, I underlined the importance of the family as a fundamental building block in society, one where the values essential for peaceful coexistence can be learned and then transmitted to future generations. From the responsible and definitive "yes" of a man and a woman, and the conscious "yes" of the children who gradually join the family, its members give their consent to the building up of the common good. This is what makes it possible for the wider community to prosper, locally, nationally, and even internationally (cf. *Message for the 2008 World Day of Peace*, 6). I know that the people of Africa place a high value on maintaining family bonds, and I encourage your Government to ensure that public policy continues to assist and strengthen the family in every way. Only thus will firm foundations be laid for renewing the social infrastructure that has been so badly damaged by decades of violent conflict.

You can be sure, Mr Ambassador, that the Church in Liberia is eager to contribute to the building up of family life, and to the provision of education and health care that are so sorely needed throughout the country. I greatly appreciate President Johnson-Sirleaf's words of praise for the Church's activity in these areas throughout Liberia's history, and indeed for the courageous witness of the martyrs who dedicated themselves to serving the country even at the cost of their lives. The many devoted men and women – priests, religious and lay faithful – who carry out their apostolate in your country today are no less committed to the people they serve, and to the promotion of justice, peaceful coexistence and reconciliation between the warring factions of the recent past.

The educational apostolate is perhaps their most significant investment in Liberia's future. Many of your children and young people have been traumatized by the experience of war, some of them forced to become soldiers and to abandon their education, resulting in low levels of literacy across the population. The Church in such circumstances seeks to offer the people hope, to give them faith in the future, and to show them that they are loved and cared for, to lead them, in other words, towards an encounter with Christ the Saviour of humanity. In this way, Your Excellency, I am confident that the cordial relations existing between Liberia and the Holy See will bear abundant fruit for the growth and increasing prosperity of your beloved country for many years to

come.

In offering my best wishes for the success of your mission, I would like to assure you that the various departments of the Roman Curia are ready to provide help and support in the fulfilment of your duties. Upon Your Excellency, your family and all the people of Liberia, I cordially invoke God's abundant blessings.

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