



The Holy See

*Discurso al Embajador del LÍBANO,
Excmo. Sr. Don Antoine JEMHA**

17 de diciembre de 1990

Mister Ambassador,

With all my heart I bid you welcome as you begin your mission to the Holy See by presenting to me the Letters by which His Excellency Mr. Elias Hraoui, President of the Lebanese Republic, accredits you. In receiving you after an especially difficult period for your homeland, already tried by more than 15 years of suffering, I want to greet all the Lebanese in your person with an especially warm greeting.

As I have expressed the wish so many times, I hope that this year will mark the end of the long course of trials which your beloved people have undergone. To my satisfaction I have heard you mention the peace process now under way: it should contribute to a return to normalcy and allow the people of Lebanon to rediscover in their land the freedom and peace by which they can truly feel that they are citizens with full rights, each person exercising his or her responsible part in the life of the nation. With you the Holy See desires that there may be concrete progress in that regard without delay.

After so many years of conflict, the path is filled with pitfalls. However, I am convinced that the people of Lebanon will have the capacity strength and especially the will to overcome the obstacles and rebuild a free and independent country that is faithful to its rich cultural and spiritual traditions.

2. My hope is founded on the conviction that the faith in one God, shared by all Lebanese, can and must contribute fundamentally to national reconciliation. Only a deeply spiritual common attitude will help to overcome the divisions which have been aggravated by violence and will guarantee that the existence of different communities will not cause opposition between factions but may

rather constitute a wealth for the country which for centuries has been characterized by pluralism.

I fervently renew my appeal to all of Lebanon's religious leaders that each of them insistently try to convince their religious communities to show their magnanimity, openness of spirit and understanding, thus cultivating respect for others and fraternal solidarity in order to construct the true common good. This involvement is first of all a duty imposed by faithfulness to the memory of your many innocent countrymen who have been the victims of this endless conflict. If it is not so, the dead, the wounded, the dislocated and impoverished families will have suffered in vain. May the memory of so many sorrows and injuries which are still fresh urge everyone to make a definitive renunciation of violence and to reconstruct a society which is worthy of mankind!

3. Mister Ambassador, you have made reference to your fellow citizens who have taken the path of exile. My thoughts also go out to them. Though they have left their land, often impelled by very difficult circumstances, may they not lose the desire and hope of returning to their homeland! Most of all, may they remain attached to their homeland and in close solidarity with their brothers and sisters! They can contribute to a considerable degree to the overcoming of hatred; they can play a significant role in bringing peace to hearts; they can give effective support for the economic recovery of the country.

It is through the equal involvement of all her children that Lebanon will be able to continue her progress in strengthening the institutions of the State and restoring a society which assures security for all and confidence in the future.

4. We must also recall that the long and tragic conflict which has torn Lebanon apart was not caused solely by unresolved problems there, but was also fueled and sometimes even provoked by external difficulties and foreign interests. We should also emphasize that Lebanon's health and its return to a normal existence could not be won without the help of other countries in the region who must avoid every new motive for confrontation and, in particular, allow the people of Lebanon to overcome and reject the logic of confrontation in order to create together the conditions for a national life founded on law and the legitimate desires of each of the groups which comprise the nation.

As you yourself have pointed out, Your Excellency, on many occasions I have declared that the disappearance of Lebanon or the qualities of its national life which have become a living "message" would be an irreparable loss for the world. By that I wanted to alert the peoples who are friendly to Lebanon, the countries of goodwill and the entire international community. Once again I address a strong appeal to them, that they show that they are attentive to Lebanon's sovereignty and in solidarity with its fate: it is a matter of protecting the exemplary wealth of the co-existence of its citizens and at the same time respecting the international order itself.

5. Mister Ambassador, please express to the authorities of your country and all your fellow citizens

the fraternal sentiments of the members of the Catholic Church and especially my affectionate regard for your people.

As you begin your mission to the Holy See, be assured that you will find among my collaborators an attentive ear and a constant desire to facilitate your task. At this time when we are celebrating the birth of the Saviour, I implore the merciful kindness of the Most High to give His gifts of peace and light to all the people of Lebanon.

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