



## The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II  
TO H.E. Mr RATU EPELI NAILATIKAU  
NEW AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI  
TO THE HOLY SEE\*Friday, 15 November 1991**

*Mr Ambassador,*

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 Fiji to the Holy See. I ask you kindly to convey my greetings to your President, Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau, and to the members of your Government, with the assurance of my continued good wishes that your nation, composed of people of many races, cultures and religions, will always experience the blessings of prosperity and social concord. In your efforts to consolidate national unity, may you and your fellow-citizens "always cherish your own particular cultural values and customs as a means of enriching one another" (John Paul II, *Homily at Albert Park in Suva (Fiji)*, 1 [21 November 1986]).

As you have indicated, Fiji faces the continuing challenge of building unity from diversity and establishing a society in which the rights of every individual are acknowledged and all are granted an opportunity to participate fully in the life of the nation. Authentic harmony, between individuals, communities or entire nations, is manifested in concern for the welfare of all people and the pursuit of the common good through policies and actions which promote integral development. In your own country, as elsewhere, progress towards national unity and prosperity will largely depend upon the extent to which its citizens are motivated by a spirit of solidarity which embraces all people and fully respects the dignity and rights of each. At the present time, as you and your fellow-citizens are engaged in the task of framing a national Constitution, it is important that your commitment to these fundamental principles be clearly reaffirmed and receive adequate juridical expression in the laws which will guide Fiji's future growth.

Among the fundamental rights which have their origin in the dignity of the human person, I have frequently called attention to religious freedom, which can in a certain sense be considered the "source and synthesis" of all human rights (cf. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 47). Inasmuch as

each person has the right and the duty to seek the truth and act in accordance with its demands without interference from any human authority, the extent to which a society respects the conscience of its individual members will constitute an accurate measure of its regard for other human rights. Within pluralistic societies like your own, respect for the conscience of others can be fostered through greater knowledge of other cultures and religions and the promotion of a balanced understanding of necessary and legitimate differences. Indeed, "what better means is there of building unity within diversity than a commitment on the part of all to a common search for peace and a common affirmation of a freedom which enlightens and esteems the conscience of everyone?" (John Paul II, *Message for the World Day of Peace 1991*).

Your Excellency has kindly referred to the contribution which the Catholic Church has made to the development of your society. By her preaching, her activity in the fields of health care and social welfare, and her educational apostolate, the Church desires to instil in her members a deeper awareness of the unity of the whole human family and the obligation of all to build a society ever more in conformity with man's surpassing dignity (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 91). Through her efforts to spread the teaching of the Gospel, "the Church offers a force for liberation which promotes development precisely because it leads to conversion of heart and of ways of thinking, fosters the recognition of each person's dignity, encourages solidarity, commitment and service of one's neighbour, and gives everyone a place in God's plan" (John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 59).

While it is true that the political community and the Church remain independent of each other and autonomous in their respective spheres of activity, nevertheless "they are both at the service of the personal and social vocation of the same individuals", and will be successful in serving the good of all to the extent that they develop a healthy cooperation (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 76). In this regard, I would assure Your Excellency of the willingness of the Church in Fiji to contribute to the progress of society not only through the work of her various institutions, but also, and more importantly, "by forming the consciences of her members in openness towards others and respect for them, in that tolerance which accompanies the search for truth, and in a spirit of solidarity" (John Paul II, *Message for the World Day of Peace 1991*).

Mr Ambassador, I offer you my prayerful good wishes as you begin your mission, and I assure you of the readiness of the various offices of the Roman Curia to assist you in fulfilling your new duties. Upon yourself and all the beloved people of the Republic of Fiji I cordially invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty God.

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\*AAS 83 (1992), p. 982-984.

*Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. XIV, 2 pp. 1155-1157.

*L'Attività della Santa Sede* 1991 pp. 956-957.

*L'Osservatore Romano* 16.11.1991 p.4.

*L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly edition in English* n.48 p.4.

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