



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. MR MARK EDWARD PELLEW
NEW AMBASSADOR OF GREAT BRITAIN TO THE HOLY SEE**

Saturday, 31 January 1998

Your Excellency, I am pleased to extend a cordial welcome to you as you present the Letters of Credence whereby Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II has appointed you her Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Holy See. I am grateful for the greetings which you bring from Her Majesty and I ask you to convey to her the assurance of my prayers and good wishes. You mention your Government's concern for the promotion of a foreign policy founded on respect for human rights. The celebration of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the promulgation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is an appropriate occasion for world leaders to renew their commitment to defending the fundamental rights of the human person. The preamble of that document declares that the "recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world". The Declaration emphasises that the same rights belong to every individual and to all peoples. In my recent *Message for the World Day of Peace*, I drew attention to a tendency in some quarters to weaken the universal and indivisible character of human rights. It is therefore vital that the International Community should feel in duty bound to ensure that the same basic social, economic and cultural rights are available to all. The commitment to defend and protect human rights is closely linked with the Church's mission in the modern world, convinced as she is that the promotion of peace, justice and solidarity is a truly practical and effective witness to the Gospel message regarding the sacred character of human life. Hence the Holy See insists firmly on every individual's fundamental right to life as well as the right to live in a united family, to develop one's intelligence and freedom in seeking and knowing the truth, the right to share in the work which makes use of the earth's resources, and the right to derive from that work the means to support oneself and one's dependents (cf. *Centesimus Annus*, 47). Among these basic rights, religious freedom, "understood as the right to live in the truth of one's faith and in conformity with one's transcendent dignity as a person" (*Centesimus Annus*, 47), is an essential requirement of the dignity of every person and a cornerstone of the structure of human rights. Religious freedom includes the freedom to practise one's faith within an organized religious community. Everyone must be allowed to do so free of coercion (cf. *Dignitatis Humanae*, 1), and therefore the State, which cannot claim authority, direct or indirect, over a person's religious convictions, should find the way to ensure that the rights of all individuals and

communities are equally guaranteed, while safeguarding public order. It is important that Governments work together to guarantee that the fundamental right to religious freedom is everywhere respected, and I am heartened by your own Government's concerns in this regard. As experience shows, efforts to promote peace among peoples can succeed only if there is a willingness to engage in a dialogue which respects the rights of all the parties concerned and without recourse to means contrary to the very nature of the negotiating process. This dialogue is admittedly difficult, and patience, good will and genuine openness are required in order to bring it to fruition. In this regard, I cannot but encourage the present dialogue between the various parties in Northern Ireland, in the hope that the desire for reconciliation and trust will prevail, in spite of the enormous difficulties involved and recurring moments of crisis. In my recent speech to the Diplomatic Corps, I referred to the various trials which afflict the peoples of the Great Lakes region of Africa: "Armed conflict, displacement of persons, the tragedy of refugees, deficient health conditions, a defective administration of justice" (*Speech to the Diplomatic Corps*, 10 January 1998, 4). While the leaders of the countries in this region have the primary responsibility to find solutions to these problems, Governments such as your own can help in no small way to achieve a cessation of hostilities and ensure that the basic principles of justice are observed. The Holy See and the various Catholic aid organizations are already engaged in joint efforts with various International Organizations to improve the quality of human life not only in that part of Africa but throughout the world. This too is an area in which there is ample room for cooperation between us. In effect, the promotion of world peace calls for a commitment on the part of the International Community to the integral development of all peoples and nations. In this regard the Holy See subscribes to appeals coming from many quarters for world leaders to take steps to reduce the heavy burden of external debt which hinders the social, political and economic progress of poorer countries (cf. *Message for the World Day of Peace 1998*, 4). I welcome your Government's resolve to find a solution to this problem before the end of the century. A particular difficulty with regard to development is posed by the arms trade. Some poorer countries are tempted to exhaust much needed resources on the acquisition of military technology, instead of using them to guarantee a better standard of living for their citizens. Nations which produce and export arms have a serious moral responsibility to ensure that this trade does not further increase the threat to peace within countries and among nations. It is to be hoped that the European Union's deliberations on establishing a code of conduct to regulate the export of arms will go some way towards diminishing the temptation for developing countries to waste their resources in this way. In this regard, public opinion has welcomed the signing in Ottawa of the International Convention banning anti-personnel landmines, which have been a major obstacle to the peaceful reconstruction of war-torn regions throughout the world. I share your hope that this Convention will eventually be signed by all members of the International Community, and I commend your Government's decision to allocate funds for the removal of these devices. There is a need for continued international cooperation to ensure that the dangers and threats to development posed by such weapons are permanently removed. Your Excellency, in mentioning only a few of the important issues which you have raised, I have sought to indicate how the Church's concern for peace is based essentially on her spiritual mission to serve the human person, created in God's image and likeness and called to eternal life. As you undertake your duties, I am confident that your mission will serve to strengthen the friendly relations existing between the United Kingdom and the Holy See. I assure you of the cooperation and assistance of the various departments of the Roman Curia, and I invoke God's blessings upon you and upon all those whom you represent. ©

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