



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. MR MOSES MUSONDA
NEW AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF ZAMBIA
TO THE HOLY SEE***

28 May 1998

Mr Ambassador, As you present the Letters of Credence by which you are appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Zambia to the Holy See I offer you warm greetings and welcome you to the Vatican. With gratitude for the good wishes which you bring from His Excellency President Frederick J. Chiluba, I ask you to convey to him my own cordial good wishes and the assurance of my prayers for the peace and well-being of your nation, especially now that the declared state of emergency in your country has ended and the situation returns to normal. Although nearly ten years have passed since my Pastoral Visit to Zambia, the memories of the time I spent among your people remain vividly etched in my mind. My travels to the various countries of the world are made principally as the Bishop of Rome and Successor of Saint Peter; at the same time, however, they enable me to manifest solidarity with all peoples as they work to achieve their destiny. The Holy See is present in the international community not as a political, economic or military power, but as an active partner in the continuing discussions on the moral and ethical questions facing our world today. It is in this context that I am pleased to note Your Excellency's remarks concerning the necessary contribution of Christian principles and values in the struggle to overcome injustice and evil at both the personal and the institutional levels. Indeed, the two great commandments which Christians have received from their Lord — "You shall love the Lord your God with all your strength, and your neighbour as yourself" (cf. Mk 12:30-31) — clearly preclude all behaviour and attitudes on the part of individuals and leaders alike which may cause harm, suffering or injury to others. It is on the basis of these same two commandments, and following the example of the Lord himself who "came not to be served but to serve" (Mt 20:28), that the Church is actively involved in the life of your country. She is most notably present in the field of education and in the areas of health and social services, offering assistance to all Zambians regardless of religious affiliation. I very much appreciate Your Excellency's expression of esteem for the contribution which the Catholic Church makes in this regard. The church and the political community, though independent and self-governing, work for the personal and social well-being of the same human beings. For her part, the church "contributes to the wider application of justice and charity within and between nations. By preaching the

truth of the gospel and shedding light on all areas of human activity through her teaching and the example of the faithful, she shows respect for the political freedom and responsibility of citizens and fosters these values” (pastoral constitution on the church in the modern world *gaudium et spes*, 76). Chief among these freedoms and responsibilities, and the cornerstone of all human rights, is freedom of religion. For this freedom is an irreplaceable component of the good of individuals and of society as a whole. It is a sad fact that, fifty years after the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, there are still millions of people in various parts of the world who are suffering because of their religious beliefs, subjected to repressive and oppressive legislation, the victims sometimes of open persecution but more often of subtle forms of discrimination. Such situations bode ill for world peace and for the advancement of justice and truth. The Church endeavours to remind all people, and world leaders in particular, that social order itself is founded upon and directed towards the human person, with his inalienable rights which are not conferred from outside but which arise from human nature itself. Nothing and nobody can destroy these rights, nor can any external constraint eliminate them: for they are rooted in what is most profoundly human. All individuals, according to the dictates of their own conscience, must be free to express themselves in acts of conscious choice. As I said in my [1998 World Day of Peace Message](#): “The freedom with which the Creator has endowed man is the capacity always given him to seek what is true by using his intelligence and to embrace without reserve the good to which he naturally aspires, without being subjected to undue pressures, constraints or violence of any kind” (No. 1). The freedom of individuals in their quest for truth and in the corresponding profession of their religious faith must be specifically guaranteed within the juridical structure of society. That is to say, religious freedom “must be recognized and confirmed by civil law as a personal and inalienable right in order to be safeguarded from any kind of coercion by individuals, social groups or any human power” (*ibid.*) This right to freedom of religion is not just one human right among many others but is rather the most fundamental right. Its observance is a true measure of a society’s commitment to uphold and defend the human dignity of all its members. Mr Ambassador, as you begin your mission I assure you of the readiness of the various offices of the Roman Curia to help you in the fulfilment of your duties. I am confident that your work will serve to strengthen the good relations which already exist between the Holy See and the Republic of Zambia. Upon Your Excellency and all the people of your country I invoke the abundant blessing of Almighty

God.

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