



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC
OF PAKISTAN TO THE HOLY SEE***

Thursday 16 December 1999

Mr Ambassador,

It is a pleasure for me today to welcome you to the Vatican, and to accept the Letters of Credence by which you are appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to the Holy See. I wish to express my gratitude for the message of greeting which you bring from President Muhammad Rafiq Tarar, and from the Government and people of Pakistan. I ask you to convey to them my good wishes and the assurance of my prayers for the prosperity, harmony and well-being of your country.

Mr Ambassador, I thank you for your kind words of esteem for the Holy See's efforts within the international community to promote peace and human development throughout the world. The Holy See sees this work as part of its service to the human family, motivated by an abiding concern for the well-being of all peoples. Cooperation among peoples, nations and governments is an essential condition for ensuring a better future for all, for building solid foundations of peace and fostering development through responsible use of the world's resources. The international community faces many formidable challenges in its efforts in this regard, among which are the serious problems which you mention: situations of poverty and economic deprivation, ethnic and religious rivalries, and the denial of the right of peoples to determine their own destiny.

At the root of many of these difficulties is a refusal to recognize the inherent and inalienable dignity of the human person. In my Message for the World Day of Peace 1999, I stated that the dignity of the human person is "a transcendent value, always recognized as such by those who sincerely search for the truth" (No. 2) Failure to respect this dignity leads to the various and often tragic

forms of discrimination, exploitation, social unrest and national and international conflict with which we are unfortunately so familiar in recent times. Only when the dignity of the person is upheld and guaranteed can there be a solid basis for peace and genuine development that embraces everyone.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Fiftieth Anniversary of which we celebrated last year, was arrived at as a result of the sad experience and terrible sufferings of the Second World War. It was motivated by a strong desire to ensure that every human person was recognized as the subject of the same universal and indivisible rights. The spirit of the Declaration is captured in its preamble, which affirms that "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 construction of a peaceful society and its genuine progress is dependent on the promotion of a culture which respects and protects the fundamental and inalienable rights of the human person, the most basic of which are the right to life, the right to freedom (including freedom of thought, conscience and religion) and the right to participate fully in society. From these basic rights flow the various civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights which are essential to the well-being of individuals and societies.

The significance which religious and cultural traditions have in the lives of people is a clear indication of how mistaken it is to think that human development can be reduced to the purely economic.

Development has deep human, social and political aspects. Genuine progress cannot be identified with the accumulation of goods; instead it must lead to the genuine and overall betterment of man seen in his totality. It therefore necessarily possesses a moral dimension, made up of rights and duties. As a result, it is wrong to attach to financial and technological assistance conditions which operate against the ethical and religious traditions and convictions of a people. In fact, when individuals and communities do not see a rigorous respect for their moral, cultural and spiritual character, then all the rest - availability of goods, abundance of technical resources applied to daily life, a certain level of material well-being - will prove unsatisfying and in the end contemptible (cf. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 33). Development programmes, both within individual countries and at the international level, must be planned and carried out within a framework of solidarity and freedom which is respectful of the truth of the human person.

Religious freedom constitutes the very heart of human rights (cf. Message for the World Day of Peace 1999, 5). Violation of this right is a source of immense suffering for believers, and it is therefore essential that, when a State grants special status to one religion, this must not be to the detriment of the others. At a time when various parts of the world are torn by conflict in the name of religious belief, efforts are necessary to ensure that a spirit of mutual tolerance and respect prevails. Recourse to violence in the name of religious belief is a perversion of the very teachings of the major religions. Instead, dialogue must be promoted among the religions present in a

territory so that all will see that authentic religious belief inspires peace, encourages solidarity, promotes justice and upholds liberty (cf. Address on the occasion of the Closing Celebration of the Interreligious Assembly, 28 October 1999, No. 3). As the world moves into a new millennium, there must be an increased awareness of the universal brotherhood of all people in the one human family, and greater cooperation among the followers of the world's religions in fostering the spiritual values which humanity today needs more than ever.

The Catholic community in Pakistan is small in relation to the whole population, but its members are proud to consider themselves Pakistani citizens. They remain committed to playing a full part in their country's political, social and cultural development, not least through educational and health care activities and assistance to the needy. In fulfilling her task, the Church seeks no special privileges but merely wishes to exercise her rights freely and to have these rights respected. In this way the Church will be able to pursue her spiritual and humanitarian mission, and contribute to building a society of justice, mutual trust and cooperation.

Mr Ambassador, your country is facing various difficulties and challenges at the present time. I pray that Almighty God will guide the leaders of Pakistan in charting a course which will effectively lead to the well-being of the nation and the good of society, and will lay the bases for lasting peace throughout the region. As you begin your mission, I offer you wholehearted good wishes, and I assure you of the readiness of the offices of the Roman Curia to assist you. Upon yourself and the people of Pakistan I invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty God.

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