



# The Holy See

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## **ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR OF RWANDA TO THE HOLY SEE\***

*Thursday, 16 December 1999*

*Mr Ambassador,*

1. The presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Rwanda to the Holy See gives me the opportunity to receive and welcome you at the Vatican.

I was touched by the greetings you addressed to me on behalf of H.E. Mr Pasteur Bizimungu, President of the Republic. In return, please convey my respectful wishes for his person and for the accomplishment of his high office at the service of all his compatriots. I would also like to offer the Rwandan people my cordial greeting. I hope, after the trials they have endured, that each person and each family will experience a time of reconciliation and renewed commitment to the building of a prosperous society ever worthier of man and of his spiritual vocation.

2. In your speech, Mr Ambassador, you told me that your country's leaders wish to do all they can so that Rwandans can live together in peace, justice and respect for human rights. Indeed, after the tragedy that wounded Rwandans so deeply, the search for an increasingly harmonious coexistence among all the nation's members must be a priority. That is why it is each person's duty, especially of those with responsibilities for national life, to begin creating the conditions that will make true reconciliation possible.

3. The quality of the relations between the Catholic Church and the Rwandan State is certainly one element that can enable society to advance on the paths of new hope for its future. While respecting each side's specific role, I hope that trusting cooperation, will develop between the Catholic community and the country's leaders in a climate of serenity and truth that will help establish genuine harmony and peaceful social relations among all the nation's children. On the

other hand, it should be remembered that "where lies and falsehood are sown, there suspicion and division flourish" (*Message for the World Day of Peace 1997*, n. 5).

As I have often had occasion to say, justice is an indispensable prerequisite for forgiveness and reconciliation. It is the essential right of every person to have his dignity respected and the right of every community to be treated justly. In this regard, I strongly encourage your country to make every possible effort to provide prisoners with more decent living conditions and the possibility of being judged in all fairness according to the principles of law and in conformity with fundamental moral norms. I also hope that the duration and severity of the punishments imposed will be carefully assessed and determined, and that there will be no need to take the extreme measure of the death sentence.

4. For the Catholic Church, the Great Jubilee she is preparing to celebrate is a "year of grace", and most particularly a year of reconciliation between enemies. She therefore feels called vigorously to promote everything that can contribute to unity and brotherhood between individuals and communities. She intends to look to the future with the power of hope, which "offers solid and profound reasons for a daily commitment to transform reality in order to make it correspond to God's plan" (*Apostolic Letter Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 46). With all people of good will, her hope is to help create a new culture of solidarity and cooperation so that all forms of violence causing some to dominate others will come to an end.

5. Permit me through you, Mr Ambassador, to extend my warmest greetings to the Bishops and to the entire Catholic community of Rwanda. In the delicate period that the Church is still going through, I encourage all her members to remain steadfast in faith, to put their hope in Christ, who is "the Way, and the Truth, and the Life", and, united with their Pastors, to bear ardent witness to God's love among their brothers and sisters. I also invite them to seek the paths of forgiveness and brotherhood with renewed zeal and in sincere collaboration with all their compatriots.

6. As you begin your mission to the Apostolic See, I offer you my best wishes for its success. Be assured that you will always receive the attentive and understanding welcome you may need from those who work with me.

I wholeheartedly invoke an abundance of divine blessings upon Your Excellency, as well as upon all the Rwandan people and their leaders.

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