



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. MR BONAVENTURE NDONG-EKOMIE,
AMBASSADOR OF THE GABONESE REPUBLIC
TO THE HOLY SEE***

Friday, 4 June 1999

Mr Ambassador,

1. I am pleased to welcome Your Excellency for the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Gabonese Republic to the Holy See.

I am touched by your kind words and the greetings you have conveyed to me on behalf of His Excellency, President El Hadj Omar Bongo of the Gabonese Republic. I would be grateful if you would bring him and the people of Gabon my cordial wishes for the happiness and prosperity of the whole country, as I pray God to grant that everyone may live in a nation of ever greater brotherhood and solidarity, where the gifts received from God can be developed for the benefit of all.

2. In your address you stressed the importance the Apostolic See gives to the quest for peace among peoples. Indeed, it is particularly urgent as we approach the third millennium to create the conditions of social life which no longer allow violence to be seen as an appropriate way to resolve conflicts. The terrible suffering which is still the daily lot of so many peoples, victims of fratricidal conflicts especially on the African continent, must spur national leaders and all people of good will to be firmly committed to searching for solutions that respect human life and people's rights, offering them the opportunity to progress towards true reconciliation.

I am delighted that Gabon, which as you have just mentioned is faithfully committed to the principles of peace and stability on the continent, is helping ever more effectively in central Africa to foster harmonious, cooperative relations between nations and between human communities.

3. If lasting social balance is to be established, within every country the strengthening of a State based on law and on

respect for every human person and the basic requirements connected with it should go hand in hand with a public administration which is effectively at the service of all. I therefore strongly encourage anyone with responsibility in national government not to be discouraged and in all circumstances to seek the common good with firm determination. Indeed, as I wrote in my Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*, "to reconcile profound differences, overcome long-standing ethnic animosities and become integrated into international life demands a high degree of competence in the art of governing" (n. 111). Moreover, to encourage an honest administration of the common patrimony and to reduce the causes of opposition between groups, it is essential to foster a sound civic and moral training of consciences that will inculcate a sense of responsibility and the recognition of each person with his differences. Thus it will be possible to establish harmonious relations between all the members of society, with justice and equity.

4. Mr Ambassador, to respond to her vocation to bear witness always and everywhere to Christ's Gospel, the Catholic Church intends to cooperate with everyone involved in the organization of human society, especially those who are responsible for governing. I am therefore pleased with the agreement recently signed between your country and the Holy See to facilitate the religious mission of the Catholic Church and her service to all Gabonese without distinction, while respecting the independence and autonomy of both Church and State. I hope that this agreement, based on the recognition of religious freedom and the spiritual principles which inspire your rich national tradition, will bear abundant fruits for the well-being and integral development of each individual and of all Gabonese society.

5. Permit me, Mr Ambassador, to take advantage of this happy occasion to extend my cordial greetings, through you, to the Bishops and all the Catholics of Gabon. I know of their attachment to their country and their determination to work for its development with all their compatriots. As we are preparing to celebrate the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, I affectionately invite them to be ever more ardent artisans of peace and brotherhood, firmly united around their Pastors in faith and in love.

6. Mr Ambassador, as you officially begin your mission to the Apostolic See, I offer you my cordial wishes for the noble task which awaits you. Be assured that those who work with me will offer you the attentive and understanding assistance you may need.

I warmly impart an abundance of the Almighty's blessings upon you, Your Excellency, upon the nation's leaders and upon all the people of Gabon.

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