



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR  
OF THE STATE OF ERITREA  
TO THE HOLY SEE\***

*Thursday, 14 December 2000*

*Mr Ambassador,*

I extend a warm welcome to you as I accept the Letters of Credence appointing you Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the State of Eritrea to the Holy See. Reaffirming my affection and esteem for the people of your country, I wish to lend my whole-hearted support to the peace accord which in these days has been signed by your Government and that of Ethiopia: by means of this treaty a formal agreement now puts an end to almost three years of a confrontation which has left untold suffering, death and destruction in its wake. I take this opportunity to renew my appeal to all parties to work with courage and vision to overcome the continuing difficulties so that a just and lasting peace based on mutual understanding, reconciliation and cooperation may reign once more in the area.

In this regard, I commend those world leaders and statesmen whose efforts and personal intervention helped to bring about the cease-fire; in particular I acknowledge the effective assistance of the Organization of African Unity in brokering the accord which has silenced arms and brought an end to open hostilities. This Pan-African organization is in a uniquely privileged position to foster political, economic, social and cultural cooperation on the continent, and can be effective in promoting peaceful solutions to disputes between African nations. We must hope that the various member States, as well as the worldwide family of nations, will support the OAU in these tasks, and make it possible for this international body to play an increasingly positive role in the development of Africa and her peoples in the new millennium.

The recourse to conflict, even when seeming to resolve the problems at hand, succeeds only in

exacerbating the difficulties and disseminating further tragedy and destruction. It is for this reason that in every part of the world the Holy See encourages peoples and their governments to rise above the "culture of force" and to reject the temptation to violence and armed aggression. Peace, if it is to be genuine and lasting, needs more than external structures and mechanisms; it requires a style of human coexistence marked by mutual respect and by justice. There is no contradiction between reconciliation and justice; reconciliation does not lessen the requirements of justice but seeks to reintegrate individuals and groups into society, and States into the community of Nations, through a renewed and shared sense of responsibility for the common good and, wherever possible, through solidarity with the victims of past injustices.

For all Eritreans, the task ahead is to work together to build a society in which the dignity of the human person and respect for human rights is the norm of conduct for everyone. Drawing on its noblest values and traditions, Eritrea — indeed all of Africa — will find the strength and inspiration to grow in solidarity, justice and well-being.

Mr Ambassador, you have mentioned the new challenges which Eritrea faces as it seeks to ensure a democratic and constitutional form of government for its people. Perhaps the greatest challenge is to be found at the level of education. Indeed, there is no greater investment that a nation can make for itself and its citizens. A society which seeks true development and progress, and which desires to contribute to the true advancement of its members, must give them the means to cultivate an objective understanding of themselves and of the world in which they live, as well as of social, cultural and religious traditions which are different from their own. Likewise, education is the key which makes it possible for citizens to participate in making political choices by electing and holding accountable those who govern them (cf. *Centesimus Annus*, No. 46).

Deeply concerned about the social dimension of human life, the Church contributes to the political order by teaching the inalienable dignity of the human person. She urges her members to take a responsible part in the political, economic and social life of their respective communities, and to imbue all areas of life with the Gospel message of brotherhood, reconciliation and peace. It is for this reason that the Church is deeply committed to education, health care, social services and humanitarian aid, both in your own country, on all the continent of Africa and throughout the world. I thank Your Excellency for your recognition of the contribution made by the Church in this regard in Eritrea.

Mr Ambassador, I ask you kindly to convey to President Issaias Afwerki and your Government my personal greetings and prayerful best wishes for the peace and progress of Eritrea. I assure you of the full cooperation of the Holy See as you take up your high responsibilities, and I wish you every success in your mission. Upon yourself and the beloved people of the State of Eritrea I invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty God.

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*\*Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. XXIII, 2 p.1129-1131.

*L'Osservatore Romano* 15.12. 2000 p.8.

*L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly edition in English* n. 51/52 p.7.

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