



# The Holy See

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***ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER  
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR  
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE  
TO THE HOLY SEE\****

*Friday, 13 December 2002*

*Your Excellency,*

I extend a warm welcome to you as I accept the Letters of Credence appointing you Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Sierra Leone to the Holy See. Grateful for the greetings which you bring from President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah and the Government, I gladly offer my own good wishes to the authorities and people of your country and — mindful of the great hardships which the population is enduring due to years of conflict — I ask you to assure the nation of my prayers.

In the past century, tremendous progress has been made in the social, economic and scientific spheres. During this same period, however, humanity has also witnessed the violence, destruction and death that ensue when peoples and nations have recourse to arms rather than to dialogue, when war is chosen over the often more difficult path of mutual understanding and respect. And more sadly still, the beginning of this new millennium has been scarred by further terrible violence in the form of international terrorism. Thus, despite the many cultural and technological advances that have been made in the past hundred years, there remain important areas which have seen little improvement or which have even grown worse.

In situations where tensions and conflict arise within a country or between nations, the proper response is never violence and bloodshed but dialogue, with a view to the peaceful resolution of the crisis. Authentic dialogue presupposes an honest search for what is true, good and just for every person, every group and every society; it is a sincere effort to identify what people have in common despite tension, opposition and conflict: this in fact is the only sure path leading to true

peace and genuine progress. Furthermore, authentic dialogue helps the peoples and nations of the earth to recognize their mutual interdependence in the economic, political and cultural spheres. Precisely in our modern day, which is all too familiar with the latest technologies of death and destruction, there is an urgent need to build a consistent culture of peace that will help to forestall and counter the seemingly inevitable outbreaks of armed violence. This includes taking concrete steps to put an end to trafficking in arms.

Here, the duty of governments and of the international community remains essential, for it belongs to them to contribute to the establishment of peace through solid structures that, despite the uncertainties of politics, will guarantee freedom and security to all people in every circumstance.

The United Nations itself has been taking on a role of ever greater responsibility for maintaining or restoring peace in areas besieged by war and conflict. In your own country the U.N. has just extended the mandate of its peace-keeping mission: thus, the international community is itself a partner with your Government in its efforts to reintegrate ex-combatants, to facilitate the return of refugees and displaced persons, to ensure the full respect of human rights and the rule of law, with special protection afforded to women and children. In this context I cannot fail to express my immense satisfaction that after years of armed conflict, suffering and death, civil stability is returning to Sierra Leone, bringing positive prospects for the normalization of national life: may your country continue along this path with courage and perseverance.

The Catholic Church too lends her full support to activities aimed at restoring peace and bringing about reconciliation. Indeed, her Divine Founder has entrusted to her a religious and humanitarian mission, different than that of the political community, but open nonetheless to many forms of cooperation and mutual support. It is this mission which underlies the Holy See's presence in the international community, a presence directed solely to the good of the human family: promoting peace, defending human dignity and human rights, working for the integral development of peoples.

This is a duty which derives necessarily from the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and is a responsibility shared by all Christians. For this reason, the Church will continue to be a committed partner with your country as Sierra Leone continues along the path of political, social and economic development.

Mr Ambassador, I am confident that your mission to the Holy See will strengthen the bonds of understanding and friendship between us. You can be assured that the various offices of the Roman Curia will always be ready to assist you in the discharge of your high duties. Upon yourself and the beloved people of Sierra Leone I cordially invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty God.

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