



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER  
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR  
OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA TO THE HOLY SEE\***

*Saturday, 30 November 2002*

*Mr Ambassador,*

1. I am happy to receive the Letters of Credence with which you are accredited as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the Holy See.

As I offer you a cordial welcome, through you I would also like to convey my deferential greeting to the authorities of the country you are called to represent to this Apostolic See.

I willingly take this opportunity to confirm my constant closeness to the beloved peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina, who not only have had to endure a political system based on an ideology opposed to the values engraved in the human spirit, but also a long and painful war. For this reason I wanted to go personally to Sarajevo. On 12 and 13 April 1997, Providence granted me the opportunity to make a Pastoral Visit to that city that has been so sorely tried, and to reassert the need "to ensure that respect be shown for all individuals and their rights, without distinction of nationality or religion" (*Arrival address*, Sarajevo, 12 April 1997, n. 1; *ORE* 16 April 1997, p. 2).

2. Thanks be to God, the commitment of people of good will led to the Washington and Dayton Peace Accords, that lay a foundation for the State of Bosnia and Herzegovina. All this ensured that arms are now silent. However, it is necessary with great diligence to build and make lasting peace in justice, solving the problems connected with the country's future. These include the issue of the refugees and exiles who are waiting to be able to return home and an economic recovery that will restore serenity and confidence to each of the peoples.

Concrete programmes are needed that start with the person and respect for his dignity, that can

offer him the possibility of working to gain a livelihood, that should foster dialogue and collaboration among the members of civil society with full respect for the identity of each one. Only in this way can a genuine democracy be established that is "the result of appreciating the cultural, social and religious aspects of the various members of the country, with respect for fairness, justice and truth" (*Address to the Jubilee Pilgrimage from the Ecclesiastical Province of Vrhbosna*, 30 March 2000, n. 3; *ORE*, 19 April 2000, p. 4).

Establishing democracy is a demanding task that requires morality, honesty, human sensitivity, wisdom, patience, respect for others, the readiness to make sacrifices every time the common good requires it and the determination to expound and not to impose one's own viewpoints and ideas.

The task becomes even more daunting in a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious country like Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is called to build its present and future on the solid underpinning of justice, respect for others, and collaboration and solidarity among all its members, while safeguarding the sound traditions of each one of its peoples.

3. To look with greater confidence to the future it is also indispensable to promote true reconciliation and sincere forgiveness. "The spiral of 'guilt' and 'reprisals' will never end, if at a certain point forgiveness is not reached" (*Homily, Castelgandolfo*, 8 September 1994, n. 6; *ORE*, 14 September 1994, p. 2). Yes! It is not easy to forgive, but it is urgent and necessary for the good of all.

It is true that one cannot erase from memory what happened in the past, but hearts can and must be freed from bearing grudges and planning revenge. The memory of [past] errors and injustices should be a strong lesson not to let either happen again, so as to avoid new and perhaps even greater tragedies.

The Church of Bosnia and Herzegovina is already involved and makes her contribution to reconciliation and forgiveness by faithfully proclaiming the Gospel. She asks only to be able to carry out her mission, staying close to the poor and those on the fringes of society and giving a voice to those without a voice in society.

In this spirit, the Church makes every effort to promote the formation of the new generations in schools that are open to anyone who wants access to compulsory education and beyond. I am sure that the representatives of state institutions will be able to appreciate the Church's contribution in this area and will not fail to expedite the development of her scholastic institutions for the good of the children and young people of all the ethnic groups and religions that exist in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

4. All must contribute to consolidating a society that rejects every temptation to favour the few to

the detriment of the others; a society that is ready to guarantee an equality that is effective, attentive to respect for the rights, freedom and identity of each one, mindful of the local historical, social and cultural experiences; in a word, a society based on justice and peace.

Although the war ended almost seven years ago, no one has yet found concrete solutions to the tragedy of the many refugees and exiles who desire to return to their homes. I think in particular of the people waiting to be able to return to the areas of Banja Luka and Bosanska Posavina. These peoples and the refugees and exiles in other areas, are being denied the right to live peacefully on their native soil. Many are all too often forced to seek their fortune elsewhere.

These persons rightfully ask for guarantees of security and for the creation of acceptable political, social and economic conditions. They also ask for the return of their property, violently taken from them during the war.

5. The creation of an authentic atmosphere of peace is indispensable. "Peace", says the Second Vatican Council, "is more than the absence of war; it cannot be reduced to the maintenance of a balance of power between opposing forces" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 78). The Council also recalls that peace "is appropriately called "the effect of justice", and that this requires "a firm determination to respect the dignity of other human beings and other peoples" (*ibid.*).

In practice this teaching entails the commitment to shun situations that might honour results obtained through violence that injures the defenceless. It also implies the willingness to shelter them and with appropriate political and economic interventions, at both the local and institutional levels, to correct the injustice committed. In this endeavour, "the possibility of unforeseen events must not discourage anyone, but only engage the wisdom of all in correcting and improving the plans already made" (*Address to the Ambassador of Bosnia and Herzegovina*, 11 September 1998, n. 3; *ORE*, 23 September 1998, p. 4).

6. Mr Ambassador, I warmly hope that the country you represent may find understanding and concrete support in all that concerns the healing of the wounds inflicted by the recent war and past political systems, which in the 20th century have caused vast tragedies in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in other Balkan countries. The countries of the old continent and the international community will be ready to offer the necessary help to support programmes that are set up to enable Bosnia and Herzegovina and the countries of the whole of South-Eastern Europe to enter the processes of European and global integration.

I am likewise certain that Bosnia and Herzegovina will be able to make their own contribution to building the "common house", open to all the peoples of our continent. In fact, no one has the right to exclude anyone, while all have the obligation to respect the other, regardless of whether it is a small or a large country.

7. Mr Ambassador, I noted with pleasure what you mentioned concerning the mutual relations between Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Holy See and their development and deepening. As has happened so far, these relations will continue to benefit all the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In carrying out the important mission entrusted to you, Your Excellency, like your predecessor, you will meet with complete readiness on the part of the Holy See to address issues of common interest.

May your term in Rome be satisfactory and may the Lord grant that your work be profitable and interesting.

I accompany these wishes with my prayers that God, the Father of all persons and peoples, with an abundance of his gifts may assist you, your collaborators, the state authorities and the beloved people of Bosnia and Herzegovina, who are ever-present in my heart.

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