



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. MR. MICHEL RITTIE,
AMBASSADOR OF VANUATU****

Thursday, 15 May 2003

Mr Ambassador, I welcome with pleasure Your Excellency on the occasion of the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as the first Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Vanuatu to the Holy See. The words you have just addressed to me, for which I am deeply grateful, witness to the interest of your country's Authorities in developing relations of esteem and respect between the Republic of Vanuatu and the Apostolic See. Through you, I would like to present to H.E. President John Bennett Bani my best wishes for himself and for the accomplishment of his important responsibility at the service of the nation. I also thank H.E. Mr Edward N. Natapei, Prime Minister, for the respectful greetings with which he has honoured me. Lastly, I greet with affection all the people of Vanuatu. You mentioned, Mr Ambassador, the rich historical patrimony of the Archipelago of Vanuatu and its special position in Oceania, factors that have shaped the nation and made it a multicultural society in which men and women today are eager to build a fraternal society in the vast diversity of their national origins, languages, forms of religious expression and the values that motivate them. May the leaders of your young Republic persevere in ensuring that this beautiful diversity is increasingly put at the service of national unity and is expressed in political and social life, so that all the citizens may exercise their legitimate rights and take part in the political decisions that guide their common life! The path of a truly fruitful "coexistence" originates in the patiently shared concern to build a nation in which the particular features of each one serve the common good, in which the sincere desire to build a united world is expressed visibly in the choices and orientations of society and in which the desire to work without respite for justice and equity takes into account the aspirations of all the country's inhabitants and gives priority to the most deprived. This cannot be achieved without a real effort for the proper respect of persons and resources, a just division of wealth and responsibilities, as well as the constant concern to preserve the environment and natural resources. I am certain that the efforts which the people of Vanuatu and its leaders are already making, with a view to the integral development of all the citizens and the strengthening of solidarity among them all, will come to fruition. In this way the Republic of Vanuatu will also take part in the construction and consolidation of harmony throughout the region. I appreciated, Mr Ambassador, your country's openness to matters concerning the life of the world, and its desire to take an active part in the activity of the international community. This desire witnesses to a political and human maturity which clearly perceives a nation's vocation to contribute to a new international stability. At a time when deadly conflicts are continuing to fuel violence and undermine world balances, it is the task of all nations, without exception, to take up the challenge of peace and to spare no effort to

achieve a durable, effective peace in the world. No one can be excluded from this effort. Indeed, it is essential to recognize the role that all nations play, whatever their importance on the world stage, in the growth and happiness of all and in the permanent struggle to combat the scourges that threaten the survival of humanity, the tranquility of individuals and the security of societies (cf. *Address to the Diplomatic Corps, 2003*; *ORE*, 15 January 2003, pp. 3-4). I therefore invite the international community to encourage and appreciate the efforts of the smaller nations to take part in building peace, so essential to the human and spiritual growth of the world. I also hope that the development of cultural and commercial relations, which the Republic of Vanuatu already has with other nations or with international organizations, will in turn encourage in your country economic progress and social justice, essential conditions for serving the material and spiritual well-being of its population. In a spirit of dialogue and fraternal collaboration, the Catholic Church in your country, in her own province and in accordance with her own vocation, intends, through the commitment of her members, to play an active role in this integral development of individuals. By putting herself at the service of one and all in a wide range of areas, such as health care, social and charitable activities and especially education, she is determined to encourage the progress of justice and friendly co-existence. She is set on respect for freedom and for the convictions of each one and hopes to pursue a serene and respectful dialogue with all the human and religious communities present in the archipelago, thereby fulfilling the mission she has received from Christ. She rejects all forms of division and opposition which endanger the pursuit of the common good, knowing she is called to work with passion to build a true "civilization of love". Through you, Mr Ambassador, may I be permitted to greet the Catholic community present in your country, and in particular its Pastor, Bishop Michel Visi of Port-Vila. May Pastors and faithful walk the way of Christ, telling his truth and living his life, so that the peoples of the Pacific, struggling to gain unity and identity, may be more and more motivated by deep concern for peace, justice and respect for the integrity of creation! (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Oceania*, n. 8). At the time when you are beginning your mission to the Apostolic See, I offer you my best wishes for its successful accomplishment. Rest assured that with my collaborators you will always find the attentive and understanding welcome you may need. Upon you, Your Excellency, upon your family and upon all the people of Vanuatu and its leaders, I cordially invoke an abundance of divine

Blessings.

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