



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. MRS RAYCHELLE AWUOR OMAMO
AMBASSADOR OF KENYA TO THE HOLY SEE***

Thursday, 16 December 2004

Your Excellency,

It is a pleasure for me to extend a cordial welcome to you today as I accept the Letters of Credence by which you are appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Kenya to the Holy See. Though my pastoral visits to your country took place some years ago now, they remain clearly etched in my mind as events of great joy. I thank you for the greetings which you bear from President Kibaki, the Government and all the citizens of Kenya. Please convey to them my sincere best wishes and assure them of my prayers for the well-being of the nation. On arrival at Nairobi in 1995, I observed that your nation and indeed the whole continent of Africa was at a crossroads (cf. *Arrival Speech*, Nairobi, 18 September 1995). Its peoples and their leaders were being called to exercise all their wisdom in the difficult and urgent task of promoting democratic government and prudent economic development as essential elements to the building of a just society. The "winds of change" driving that common desire have not abated; indeed they have gathered strength with people demanding ever more insistently concrete action to ensure the development of a civic life marked by respect, fairness and integrity (cf. *Ecclesia in Africa*, 44). Kenya, it can now be said, has set out along the road of truth and peace. Against the often disturbing backdrop of human tragedies which continue to afflict the continent of Africa and other regions, your nation has taken a leading role in promoting peace initiatives and social stability. In this regard, the recent United Nations Security Council's sitting in your capital has given Kenya much positive attention in the international media and rightly has brought praise for the nation's considerable contribution to peace-keeping missions and projects, especially in Sudan and Somalia. Such generous undertakings, as well as bringing immediate relief to the long-suffering peoples directly affected by conflict, will also elicit in your neighbouring countries a deeper sense of shared responsibility for the defence and promotion of the fundamental human rights of the peoples of your region. When there is hesitation in the international community about the obligation to respect and implement human rights (cf. *Message for the 2003 World Day of Peace*, 5), misery ensues as is so evident today in Darfur. In addition to a country's willing participation in the accords and agreements that promote international relations, authentic development also requires adherence to a sound plan of genuine national progress. In fact, the "unbreakable bond between the work of peace and respect for truth" (*ibid.*,

8) suggests that the success of a government's participation in peace processes abroad will depend largely upon the degree of honesty and integrity with which it governs at home. In this regard, President Kibaki's determination to root out the scourge of corruption, which crushes the spirit of a nation, is to be applauded, and demands the active support of all politicians, civic leaders and bureaucrats in order that the common good may flourish. While much remains to be achieved, successes already attained in Kenya clearly give hope. Further strenuous efforts to guarantee an impartial judiciary and to ensure security through the rule of law and order are needed and will do much to favour a spirit of optimism among your people and to attract the kind of investment necessary to create the opportunities of employment which offer a brighter future to all and especially the young. The family stands at the heart of the cultures of Africa. This is a treasure which must be preserved and never neglected, for the future of your people, and that of the world, passes through the family (cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, 86). It is only right therefore that civic and religious leaders should work together to ensure that the sacred institution of marriage, with its concomitant of stable home life, is affirmed and supported. Breakdown of domestic life is always a source of intractable problems which, in addition to causing incalculable distress to individuals, undermine the very fabric of society and its means of secure development. The peoples of Kenya, though remaining confident about the future, are nevertheless suffering several acute social problems. Solutions cannot be restricted to the mere removal of hardships but instead require the courage to embrace a way of life faithful to God's plan for all men and women. In this regard, I note with grave concern the measures currently under debate in your country to facilitate abortion. In addition to violating life's essential dignity, abortion invariably causes untold emotional and psychological pain to the mother, who herself is frequently a victim of circumstances contrary to her deepest hopes and desires. Similarly, in regard to the tragedy of AIDS which the whole human family is currently facing, it must be recalled that at heart this is a question of behaviour. Proposed remedies which either ignore or reject the only genuine foundation of health and happiness in this matter – sexual fidelity within marriage and abstinence without – are likely to increase rather than resolve the tragedy and indeed can be understood as new forms of colonialism. I therefore appeal to the Christian community of Kenya to bear steadfast witness to that intimate communion of life and love which defines the family, brings joy to communities, and provides the foundation upon which the aspirations of a nation can be built. For her part the Catholic Church in Kenya will continue to support families in all possible ways, working as an ally in the pursuit of peace, stability and prosperity. Through her numerous schools, health-care facilities, and community development programmes, she is already contributing much to securing a better future for the country. In this service the Church desires neither power nor privilege, but only the freedom to express her faith and love in works of goodness, justice and peace. Your Excellency, as you enter the diplomatic community accredited to the Holy See, I assure you of the ready assistance of the various offices of the Roman Curia. May your mission serve to deepen the already strong bonds of understanding and cooperation between Kenya and the Holy See. Upon you, your family and your fellow citizens I cordially invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty God.

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