



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. MRS NEVINE SIMAIKA HALIM ABDALLA
AMBASSADOR OF THE ARAB REPUBLIC OF EGYPT
TO THE HOLY SEE***

Saturday, 18 September 2004

Madam Ambassador,

I am pleased to welcome you, Your Excellency, for the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the Holy See.

I warmly thank you for conveying to me the courteous good wishes of H.E. Mr Mohamed Hosni Mubarak, President of the Republic. I would be grateful if you would reciprocate with my cordial good wishes for him and for the prosperity of the Egyptian People.

Madam Ambassador, you have recalled the need to build a culture of peace, to pave the way to real solidarity among men and women and to make the nations' future one of true harmony. As the Holy See never ceases to recall in these troubled times, there can be no lasting peace in international relations unless the desire for dialogue gets the better of the logic of confrontation.

Whether it is in Iraq, where the return to civil peace seems so difficult to establish, in the Holy Land, unfortunately scarred by a never-ending war that fosters nothing but hatred and the desire for vengeance, or in other countries, wounded by the terrorism that so brutally strikes innocent people, violence reveals everywhere its horror and its inability to settle conflicts. It produces nothing good but only hatred, destruction and death.

I once again remind the International Community of its responsibility to encourage the return to reason and negotiation, the only possible way out of conflicts between human beings, because all peoples have the right to live in serenity and peace.

Madam Ambassador, you stressed the desire to serve peace that marks the Holy See's concerns. I am pleased to refer in turn to the culture and political tradition of your Country. Through the vicissitudes of history, this tradition of your Nation, on the boundary between the African and Asian Continents, has given it and continues to give it a special place in international relations, in order to work for peace and reconciliation between persons and peoples.

One of the main responsibilities of a State is to guarantee the peace, well-being and safety of its citizens. As you yourself mentioned, Your Excellency, with regard to the place of women in Egyptian society, this implies assuring the equality of all before the law and fostering mutual respect and good understanding between the different members of the Nation.

I know that I can count on the vigilance of the Egyptian Authorities especially to assure to all citizens the principle of freedom of worship and of religion, which is an eminent form of the freedom of individuals, hence, one of the fundamental human rights. I appeal to the leaders of civil society to ensure that they are careful to see that these individual rights are effectively respected wherever there are Christian communities, without the fear of any form of discrimination or violence. Egyptian Catholics, on their part, are pleased to play an active role in their Country's development and are constantly concerned to establish peaceful relations with their compatriots.

Religions have an important role to play in achieving the construction of peace. This mission is essential for humanity's future. They all have something to say about man, concerning his duties to the Creator, himself and his peers. They spread a doctrine that honours life as a sacred gift of God which human beings must respect and cherish.

As I have often said, it is for this very reason that religions are called to be resolutely committed to denouncing and rejecting all recourse to violence as contrary to their own aim, which is, precisely, to reconcile men and women with one another and with God.

Often involved in specifically educational tasks for children and young people, religions in this respect have an important responsibility to assume concerning the content of their teaching, to combat and reject any sectarian approach and, vice-versa, to develop and encourage all that leads to a deeper knowledge of and respect for others. You may rest assured that the Catholic Church is attending to this mission in her own domain with determination.

Egypt's prestigious al-Azhar University, which I have had the opportunity to visit, fulfils an essential function in the Muslim world and provides an opportunity for interreligious dialogue, especially between Christians and Muslims, to be continued and intensified.

It is important to develop a better reciprocal knowledge of the traditions and mentalities of the two religions, of their role in history and their responsibilities in the contemporary world, through meetings between religious leaders, but it is also appropriate to awaken respect and the desire for

mutual knowledge among individuals and communities of believers, in towns and villages. With greater mutual esteem, Christians and Muslims will be better able to work together to serve the cause of peace and a better future for humanity.

Your presence here, Your Excellency, enables me to greet through you the Pastors and faithful of the different rites that comprise the Catholic community of Egypt. I hope that the faithful will always have at heart the development of fraternal and constructive relations with one another, sharing their specific endowments and thus paying homage to Catholic unity. May they pay special attention to the quality of Gospel witness that they give to the whole population, in the schools they are responsible for and in the charitable agencies they put at the country's service!

I also invite them to pursue dialogue with their Christian brothers and sisters, particularly the members of the Coptic Orthodox Church and the Greek Orthodox Church, which is sorely tried at this time by the tragic death of its Pastor, H.B. Petros VII, Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa. May they seek to collaborate, whenever possible, in common activities at the service of men and women!

At the time when you are entering your noble mission of representation to the Holy See, I offer you my best wishes for its success. Be assured, Madam Ambassador, that you will always find a welcome as well as understanding from my collaborators.

I cordially invoke upon Your Excellency, your family as well as on all the Egyptian People and its leaders, the Almighty's abundant Blessings.

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