



The Holy See

*ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO HIS EXCELLENCY Mr FIRMIN MBOUSOU
NEW AMBASSADOR OF THE GABONESE REPUBLIC
TO THE HOLY SEE**

Thursday, 26 June 2008

Mr Ambassador,

I am pleased to welcome you, Your Excellency, on the occasion of the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Gabonese Republic to the Holy See.

I was moved by the friendly words you addressed to me, Mr Ambassador, as well as by the greeting and good wishes you conveyed to me from H.E. Mr El Hadj Omar Bongo Ondimba, President of the Republic. I would be grateful if you would reciprocate by conveying to him and to the entire Gabonese people my cordial good wishes for the Country's happiness and prosperity, as I pray God to grant that all may live in an increasingly fraternal and supportive Nation where the gifts that each one has received from God may blossom fully for the benefit of all.

You have just emphasized, Your Excellency, the importance of the relations marked by mutual trust that have existed for 40 years between Gabon and the Holy See. These ties were strengthened on the occasion of the recent visit to your Country last January of Archbishop Dominique Mamberti, Secretary for Relations with States. The warmth of the welcome that the President and the various State Authorities gave him is an expression of the harmony that marks these relations and of the desire for ongoing dialogue and collaboration. The Church's contribution to the history and construction of your Country is important, as you were eager to emphasize, Mr Ambassador. I cannot fail to appreciate this attention that your compatriots pay to the Church's mission. In this perspective, it is right to mention the Accord-Framework between Gabon and the Holy See, signed just over 10 years ago. It constitutes the basis for an increasing cooperation

between the Holy See and your Country. For the Church, these diplomatic procedures serve essentially to help her carry out her mission at the service of every person and all people in their daily lives, thereby taking part in the development of the population and of the Nation and giving each person new hope in the future.

In conformity with her vocation and especially thanks to her numerous institutions, religious Congregations and local communities overall, the Church contributes and desires to contribute increasingly to the education of men, women and children, without distinction, with respect for people and their culture, passing on to each one the spiritual and moral values indispensable for the growth of the human person. Likewise, in her long tradition for the people's well-being, the Church is involved in health-care education and in providing care for the sick. The many dispensaries run by Religious Congregations in your Country are proof of this. It is to be hoped that in the framework of an agreement the Country will fully recognize and support this charitable service offered to all who have recourse to it. Legal recognition of this kind will not fail to have beneficial effects on the religious presence and on the dynamism of structures in the health-care and social sectors.

Among the essential areas it is also necessary to mention that in connection with teaching an Accord was signed in 2001; despite her limited means, the Church is anxious to be able to continue her mission in this context, with the support of all the bodies concerned. Her wish is to educate all the young people entrusted to her to give them an integral formation which will enable them to have a better future and to take charge of their destiny, that of their family and that of society. It is also an opportunity to participate in the training of men and women who will be leaders of the Nation in the future. It is by means of a very special attention to the integral education of people that a society shows that her members constitute the principal wealth of the Nation. I can therefore only hope that the Accords will be reinforced with your Country's Bishops, concerning teaching at all levels, especially higher education. The Church intends to maintain and develop high quality teaching. This requires the confident support of the Authorities and the various services of the State. This teaching must pass on intellectual knowledge in the various domains of science and thought, but at the same time must also form the whole being while communicating the essential values, both personal and collective.

The Church's role is also to offer people human and spiritual assistance, helping them to respond to their search for meaning. It is in this spirit that she desires to be able to organize better the pastoral care of the Armed Forces, whose mission is particularly sensitive and is first and foremost a service of peace, justice and security in the Country and in the entire region. Mr Ambassador, you know that in accompanying Catholic soldiers and their families, the Church desires to help them carry out their specific task by relying on the human and moral values of Christianity so that they are able to serve their Homeland faithfully and build their personal and family lives in accordance with their Christian vocation. Indeed, it is the task of Pastors of the Church to follow the whole flock entrusted to them and it is right that members of the Armed Forces may form

special Christian communities under the guidance of a Pastor who will recognize and respect the specificity of the military world.

It is first and foremost the duty of National Leaders and of those who at all levels are called to lead the destiny of peoples to build societies of peace. I am pleased with your Country's attention in this sphere. Through you, Mr Ambassador, I invite all the authorities and people of good will, especially in the beloved Continent of Africa to be ever more committed to a peaceful, brotherly and supportive world. Today I appeal for an increasingly prophetic courage, while we remember that peace and justice go hand in hand and that this must be implemented through respect for legality in every milieu. Indeed, without justice, in the battle against every form of corruption, without respect for the rules of law, it is impossible to build true peace and it is clear that citizens will then have difficulty in trusting their leaders. Moreover, without respect for every individual's freedom, it is impossible to have peace. In conformity with her tradition, and in all the ways that are incumbent on her, the Church is prepared to collaborate with and to give her support to all people whose primary concern is to build a society that respects the most elementary human rights and who desire to build a society fit for the human person.

You are attentive, Mr Ambassador, to the important issues that affect the future of our world. This future is all too often linked to purely economic issues that give rise to numerous conflicts. It is right to ensure that the Country's inhabitants are the first to benefit from the products of the Nation's natural riches and to do all that is in our power to ensure a better protection of the planet, enabling us to bequeath to future generations an earth that is truly inhabitable and able to feed all its inhabitants.

Allow me, Mr Ambassador, to take this happy opportunity which your presence affords me to offer my cordial greetings, through you, to all the Catholics of Gabon, especially the Bishops who came here on their *ad limina* visit last October. I am aware of the attachment and affection they have for their Country, as well as of their firm determination to work for its development in fraternal harmony with all their compatriots. I affectionately invite them to continue to be increasingly fervent artisans and witnesses of peace, brotherhood and solidarity among all. Mr Ambassador, at the moment when your mission to the Apostolic See is officially beginning, I offer you my cordial good wishes for the noble task you are undertaking. You may rest assured that you will find here, with my collaborators, the attentive and understanding welcome that you may need.

I warmly invoke upon you, Your Excellency, upon the leaders of the Nation and on the entire Gabonese People an abundance of Blessings from the Almighty.

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