



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO HIS EXCELLENCY Mr GEORGE JOHANNES
NEW AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA
TO THE HOLY SEE****

Friday, 29 May 2009

Your Excellency,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the Vatican and to receive the Letters of Credence that accredit you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of South Africa to the Holy See. I thank you for the courteous greetings and sentiments of good will which you have expressed on behalf of President Jacob Zuma. I gladly reciprocate, and I ask you kindly to convey my congratulations and good wishes to His Excellency, as he assumes the office of President, and to the civil authorities and people of your country.

South Africa's rapid and peaceful transition to democratic rule has been widely acclaimed and the Holy See has followed with interest and encouragement this historic period of change. None can doubt that much credit for the progress achieved is due to the outstanding political maturity and human qualities of former President Nelson Mandela. He has been a promoter of forgiveness and reconciliation, and enjoys great respect in your country and in the international community. I would ask you kindly to convey to him my personal good wishes for his health and well-being. I also wish to recognize the contribution of all those many ordinary men and women whose integrity, reflected in their honest approach to work, has also helped to lay the foundations for a future of peace and prosperity for all.

The size of your country, its population and economic resources and the generosity of your people make South Africa one of the most influential nations on the continent. This gives her a unique opportunity to support other African countries in their efforts to achieve stability and economic progress. Having overcome the isolation associated with the Apartheid era, yet drawing on its own

painful experience, your country has made commendable efforts to bring about reconciliation in other lands through its peacekeeping forces and diplomatic initiatives. Countries such as Rwanda, Angola, Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe have benefited from this assistance. I encourage South Africa to strengthen her commitment to the noble task of assisting other nations along the road of peace and reconciliation and, especially in these difficult economic times, to continue to use her considerable human and material resources in ways conducive to the good governance and prosperity of neighbouring countries. Undoubtedly there are many challenges encountered along this path, not least of which is the large number of refugees in the region. I am confident, however, that these difficulties can continue to be addressed in the same spirit of solidarity and generosity already demonstrated by South Africans.

Mr Ambassador, you have spoken of some of the social challenges facing your country and of the development plans drawn up to meet them. Continuing poverty, and lack of basic services and employment opportunities, are present in some areas and have given rise to many other problems including violence and insecurity, substance abuse, ethnic tensions, and corruption. The distress and aggressiveness caused by poverty, unemployment and family breakdown make the efforts of the Government to address these difficulties all the more urgent. In this regard, I am encouraged to note the efforts being made to ensure the conditions necessary to attract international investment and to create greater opportunities for education and employment especially of your young people.

Your Excellency, in your address you speak of the great achievement of universal democratic rule as the basis for a better life for all. The people of South Africa have shown great moral courage and wisdom in facing past injustices. I am confident that in the current struggle against poverty and corruption, such courage and wisdom will again prevail. Your Government is rightly promoting the development of health and education services together with sustainable economic development, seeking to eradicate poverty and consolidate a climate of security. Families should be assisted in their needs and recognized as the indispensable agents in the building of a healthy society, while children and young people have the right to be granted their desire for quality schooling, extracurricular activities, and the chance to take their place in the workforce. Corruption has the effect of discouraging business initiative and investment, as well as leaving individuals disillusioned. The dynamism South Africa has introduced into the struggle against it, is therefore extremely important and must be recognized and embraced by every citizen. It falls to civic leaders in particular to ensure that the fight to eradicate corruption is sustained with impartiality, and accompanied by the respect for an independent judiciary and the ongoing development of a highly professional police force. I offer my encouragement for these challenging tasks, and trust that obstacles will continue to be overcome.

The Catholic Church is confident that the services she provides in the sectors of education, social programmes and health care have a positive impact on the life of the country. She contributes to the moral fibre of society by advocating integrity, justice and peace, and by teaching respect for

life from conception until natural death. In particular, the Church takes seriously her part in the campaign against the spread of HIV/Aids by emphasizing fidelity within marriage and abstinence outside of it. At the same time she already offers much assistance on a practical level to people suffering from this affliction on your continent and throughout the world. I encourage individuals and institutions of your country to continue to give support both at home and in the region to all who seek to alleviate human suffering through research, practical assistance and spiritual support.

Mr Ambassador, I wish you every success in your mission and assure you of the willing cooperation of the Departments of the Roman Curia. May Almighty God bestow upon Your Excellency, your family and the nation you represent, abundant blessings of well-being and peace!

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