



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. Mrs. URMILA JOELLA-SEWNUNDUN
NEW AMBASSADOR
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SURINAME TO THE HOLY SEE***

*Clementine Hall
Thursday, 13 December 2007*

Your Excellency,

It is a pleasure for me to welcome you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Suriname to the Holy See. I gladly accept your letters of Credence, and I thank you for conveying to me the courteous greetings expressed by President Ronald Venetiaan. I would ask you kindly to transmit my own greetings to His Excellency and to the people of Suriname with an assurance of my continued prayers for the peace and well-being of your country. The congenial spirit that has characterized the diplomatic ties between Suriname and the Holy See since 1994 is a great sign of hope for the future. The Church, which has played a key role in the history of your region, continues to share its peoples' aspirations for peace, social harmony and economic stability.

This year marks the Fortieth anniversary of *Populorum Progressio*, the Encyclical Letter promulgated by my Venerable Predecessor Pope Paul VI to promote "man's complete development and the development of all mankind" (5). The basic principles set forth in this document prompted a vigorous discussion not only among bishops, but also government leaders, lawmakers, economists, businessmen and intellectuals throughout the world. This lively interest continues today, generating fresh ideas for advancing the common good in ways that not only satisfy man's material needs, but actualize his full spiritual potential. *Populorum Progressio* points to the challenges facing formerly colonized countries on their journey towards national sovereignty (cf. 7). This road has not always been easy for Suriname, but its democratic institutions and national identity have been strengthened as a result of this process of adjustment to a new political

reality. I cordially invite the people of your nation to draw from the deep well of the Church's social teaching as they plan for the future.

Your Excellency has noted the extraordinary ethnic and religious diversity present in your country. Differences of origin, custom and belief are marvellous opportunities for people to learn and practise tolerance and sympathy for one another. Such habits build social cohesion and lay the groundwork for a robust democracy (cf. *Populorum Progressio*, 64). By becoming more familiar with the various *mores* coexisting within a nation, its citizens learn to set their sights on truths that transcend them both as individuals and as members of local communities. These truths, which need to be upheld by a country's rule of law and the institutions established to uphold it, also inspire men and women of goodwill to leave their limited sphere of self-interest and to place themselves at the service of their neighbours (cf. *Populorum Progressio*, 73). Suriname's five-year plan opens multiple opportunities for furthering the spirit of solidarity among your people as it paves the way to initiatives that will foster social integration. I pray that the implementation of this five-year plan will help guarantee that the basic rights of all—especially minorities and the poor—continue to be respected at every level of society (cf. *Populorum Progressio*, 9).

Your Excellency has also drawn attention to Suriname's membership in various international organizations aimed at furthering multi-lateral dialogue and cooperation. Your nation's willingness to participate in these organizations demonstrates Suriname's commitment to the resolution of regional differences in ways that honour the rightful autonomy of all interested States. Cooperation with your neighbours will also galvanize efforts to conquer the disturbing trend of international drug trafficking, the insidious effects of which can be felt throughout the global community and are particularly destructive to the poor, the young and the underprivileged. Not only does the flow of illegal narcotics do grave harm to those who abuse these substances, but the very structures necessary to facilitate this trade entangle society in a web of corruption, greed and exploitation. Madam Ambassador, while expressing my sincere appreciation for the actions already undertaken to address this complex situation, I encourage you and all those in your region to continue making every effort towards the eradication of this problem from society altogether, both by cutting it off at its sources and by combating the factors that drive people to self-abusive behaviours: especially poverty, the breakdown of the family and social disintegration.

Madam Ambassador, it is a joy for me to receive you today as you begin the mission entrusted to you. I am grateful for your assurance of Suriname's steadfast commitment to religious freedom and its spirit of cooperation with the Catholic Church in your country. In turn, I am happy to confirm the ready collaboration of the various offices and agencies of the Roman Curia. May your mission strengthen the bonds of friendship and goodwill between your Government and the Holy See. Upon you and all the people of your country, I invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty God.

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