



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. Mr OBED WADZANI
NEW AMBASSADOR OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA
TO THE HOLY SEE****

Thursday, 29 May 2008

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 Federal Republic of Nigeria to the Holy See. I thank you for the courteous greetings and sentiments of good will which you have expressed on behalf of His Excellency, Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, President of the Republic. I gladly reciprocate them, and I ask you kindly to convey my personal gratitude and good wishes to His Excellency, to the civil authorities and to the Nigerian people.

It is not only a humanitarian duty, but a source of real joy to come to the aid of those in need. Indeed, assisting others in a spirit of respect, integrity and impartiality is a rich, formative experience both for individuals and societies. In this regard, the size, population, economic resources and generosity of your people make Nigeria one of the most influential countries on the continent and give her a unique opportunity to support other African countries in achieving the well-being and stability they deserve. The nation has contributed to the many efforts to bring social reconciliation to other lands through its peacekeeping forces, material aid and diplomatic efforts. I encourage Nigeria to continue to use her considerable human and material resources in ways conducive to the peace and prosperity of neighbouring countries. Indeed, when this assistance is provided with both integrity and sacrifice it brings honour to a country's citizens and government.

In this same spirit, support must be given at home and abroad to all who seek to alleviate human suffering through research and practical assistance. The Church is confident that the services she provides in the sectors of education, social programmes and health care will continue to have a

positive impact on the struggle against poverty and disease. She is a constant advocate for life from conception until natural death. As you are well aware, the Church takes seriously her part in the campaign against the spread of HIV/AIDS by fostering programmes which emphasize fidelity within marriage and abstinence outside of it. Catholic personnel, doctors, nurses, assistants and educators will continue to remind all men and women, and especially young people, to reaffirm family values, and to act with moral courage, based in faith, in the struggle against this disease and related conditions. At the same time she is already assisting on a practical level countless people suffering from this affliction on your continent and throughout the world.

Mr Ambassador, the people of Nigeria desire a vibrant democracy and you have mentioned some of the priorities that your country has identified as necessary steps on her way to significant growth and sustained development. These include democratic governance and the rule of law, internal security, and the efficient administration of justice. As Your Excellency is well aware, good governance requires that elections are clearly seen to be free, fair and transparent. It also depends on internal security, always founded in the democratic ideal of respect for individual rights and the rule of law. To implement properly this building block of democracy requires public officials to address first of all the root causes of social unrest and second to form the populace in the virtues of respect and tolerance.

I am aware that, in the past, friction between different groups has given cause for concern. Conflict of this kind can often be traced to a variety of factors, including errors of administration, isolated grievances or ethnic tension. In this regard, I am pleased to note that in the last few years tensions appear to have eased. This can be seen as a true indicator of progress and a sign of hope for the future. In the promotion of understanding, reconciliation and good will among different groups, the Church continues to encourage a community spirit by working to eradicate prejudice and supporting openness towards all. She is especially interested in fostering interreligious dialogue, in the hope that a strong attitude of solidarity among religious leaders will progressively become embodied in popular nationwide expressions of peaceful acceptance, mutual understanding and cooperation.

A disturbing reality that is present in many countries today is criminal violence. Homicide, kidnapping for extortion, and the exploitation of women, children and foreign workers are some of the worst manifestations of this intolerable practice. Insecurity, distress and aggressiveness caused by family breakdown, unemployment, poverty or despair are some of the social and psychological factors behind this phenomenon. An already fragile situation is compounded by a pervasive materialistic mentality and a loss of reverence for the human person. At times, the feeling of hopelessness can lead people to search for a deceptively simple solution to their problems. Young people in such circumstances must be given every possible encouragement to seek improvement through education, extracurricular activities, voluntary assistance to others and, ideally, opportunities for employment. Corruption can follow in the wake of violent crime and has the effect of discouraging enterprise and investments, and undermining confidence in the political,

judiciary and economic institutions of the nation. The dynamism Nigeria has introduced into the struggle against corruption and crime and the strengthening of the rule of law is extremely important and must be sustained and applied with equity and impartiality. I pray that politicians and social workers, professional people in the fields of economy, medicine and law, police officers and judges, and all involved in combating crime and corruption will work together diligently for the protection of life and property, supported by the loyal cooperation of all citizens. The Church will not fail to make her specific contribution by offering an integral education based on honesty, integrity and love of God and neighbour. She strives to create opportunities for young people in difficult circumstances, always reminding them that “all serious and upright human conduct is hope in action” (*Spe Salvi*, 35).

Mr Ambassador, I wish you every success in your mission and assure you of the willing cooperation of the Departments of the Roman Curia. I recall with appreciation the warm reception my predecessor, Pope John Paul II, was given on the two occasions he visited Nigeria. I pray that the fond memory of this messenger of Peace will continue to unite and inspire the Nigerian people. May Almighty God bestow upon Your Excellency, your family and the nation you represent, abundant and lasting blessings of well-being and peace!

**Insegnamenti* IV, 1, 2008, p.911-914.

L'Osservatore Romano 30.5.2008, p.8.

L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English n. 23 p.13.

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