



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO SENEGAL, THE GAMBIA AND GUINEA

WELCOME CEREMONY

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

*Yundum International Airport of Banjul, The Gambia
Sunday, 23 February 1992*

*Your Excellency President Jawara,
Bishop Cleary,
Distinguished Friends,*

1. It is with a heart filled with joyful gratitude to God that I come to The Gambia. I have kissed the ground of your country as *a sign of esteem, an expression of heartfelt friendship towards you all.*

Mister President, I deeply appreciate your kind words of welcome, in which I hear the echo of the warm hospitality and noble sentiments of all Gambians. I greet you, the members of the Government and the civil authorities, and I thank you for all that you have done to make this visit possible. My cordial good wishes go to all who are present here, and to all who are listening to my voice on the Radio.

2. I know that I have come to a country which has a proud *tradition of peaceful co-existence* among its people, a country in which the ideals of tolerance, justice and freedom are held in the highest regard. You have embarked on the difficult but vitally necessary task of social and economic development for the benefit of all your people. I pray for the success of these efforts, confident that Gambians will know how to meet the challenges of the present with the wisdom and determination which mark their cultural and spiritual heritage. I can only encourage those responsible for the well-being of Gambian society to continue to be guided by a coherent vision of the common good, which ultimately implies a vivid consciousness of the dignity and the rights of the person – of all individuals without discrimination, with particular sensitivity to the needs of the

weaker members of society (Cf. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 47).

Respect for the human person, for the individual's rights and freedoms, is *at the very heart of the democratic multi-party system of government* to which you are deeply committed. As a result, all citizens can feel that they are fully at home in their own land, and that they can contribute effectively to the wellbeing of their country and work for its good name in the international community. They can support the nation's efforts to build ever better relations with other countries both near and far. In this respect, Mister President, *I wish to acknowledge with appreciation your resolute efforts to bring about a solution to the sad conflict in Liberia*. May God grant peace and justice to that sorely tried land!

3. Naturally, my visit has special *significance for the Catholic community of The Gambia*. As Pope, the Successor of Saint Peter, I must be for the whole Church a "visible source and foundation of unity of faith and fellowship" (*Lumen Gentium*, 18). I look forward to praying with Bishop Cleary and all my brothers and sisters in the Faith. I wish to strengthen them in their fidelity to the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and in their strong traditions of service to Gambian society.

Catholics in The Gambia see themselves as *true sons and daughters of this land*, an integral part of the family that is the Gambian nation. They proudly join their brothers and sisters in singing your National Anthem:

"Na njubai sama sunyu jef
jublu chi sunyu njeka u bah
te bole sunyu nit nyi nyep
di wone askan u nit".

(*"Let justice guide our actions towards the common good, and join our diverse people to prove man's brotherhood"*).

Brotherhood among all the citizens of a country is indeed an essential condition for that country's welfare and development. Policies of justice, solidarity and service of the common good are the path along which Gambian society can move with confidence towards an ever more widespread prosperity and stable peace. The Catholic community will continue to do all it can to support a *development which benefits everyone and leads to a society truly worthy of man*. Our faith in Christ obliges us to bear witness to "the gospel of peace" (Eph. 6:15), in obedience to him who said: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Mt. 5:9).

4. At this moment of happy encounter with The Gambia, I wish to extend *a special word of esteem and friendship to all the members of the Muslim community*. I am grateful for the presence of so many at this meeting today, and I know that it reflects the good relations existing here between the two traditions.

The Catholic Church everywhere, as also here in The Gambia, welcomes opportunities *for Christians and Muslims to know each other better, to share with each other their reverence for God*, and to cooperate in serving the human family. Catholics rejoice in the religious freedom which marks your society, and which makes it possible for the majority Muslim community and the Christian community to live together in respect and accord. Like the Patriarch Abraham, we are all pilgrims on the path of seeking to do God's will in everything. Although we differ in many ways, there are important elements of our respective faiths which can serve as a basis for fruitful dialogue and a strengthening of the spirit of tolerance and mutual help.

For this year's World Day of Peace I published a Message in which I wrote: "In the sacred books of the different religions, references to peace occupy a prominent place in the context of man's life and his relationship with God.... It can be said that a religious life, if it is lived authentically, cannot fail to bring forth fruits of peace and brotherhood, for it is in the nature of religion to foster an ever closer bond with the Godhead and to promote an increasingly fraternal relationship among people" (John Paul II, *Message for the World Day of Peace 1992*, 2.). Confident in this conviction, I renew an appeal I have made many times: *Let goodwill and peace govern our relations! Let us always be willing to speak to each other and listen to each other! Let the conscience of every individual be fully respected, so that the image of God in each one will shine forth and bear abundant fruits of justice, peace and love! There is so much that we can and must do together!*

5. The world is living through a time of changing economic and political relationships, a time not without grave problems and even fears for the future. As a result, and in spite of its own immense human and natural resources, Africa is finding it difficult to meet the *old challenges of poverty, hunger and ethnic rivalries, and the new challenges of materialism, the tragic spread of AIDS and the deadly onslaught of the drug culture.*

The Holy See avails itself of every occasion to remind the international community that it must not let itself be distracted to the point of neglecting its duties to this Continent. For this reason, during my visit to Senegal, I drew attention once again to the urgent needs of the Sahel Region. I ask the developed nations to give assistance wherever it is needed, but also to share their know-how, technology and skill, so that Africans themselves can be the *principal artisans of their own advancement*. I beg the leaders of Africa to encourage education at every level, so that their peoples may gain the knowledge and technical competence needed to ensure genuine progress.

6. Mister President, dear Friends: my prayer for you and for all Gambians is that you will go forward and build a national community that will be *a haven of brotherhood and peace*. God grant that The Gambia will ever be a safe and happy homeland for its people, a hospitable land where respect for the dignity of the human person will come before all other interests and concerns.

Na yalla wasal barken ju bare chi Gambia.

(May God bestow upon The Gambia his abundant blessings!)

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