



The Holy See

PASTORAL JOURNEY
TO BENIN, UGANDA AND KHARTOUM (SUDAN)

WELCOMING CEREMONY

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

International Airport of Entebbe (Uganda)

Friday, 5 February 1993

*Your Excellency President Museveni,
Honourable Members of the Government,
My Brother Bishops,
Dear Ugandan Friends,*

1. At the beginning of my Pastoral Visit to Uganda, I cannot fail to offer a fervent prayer of thanks to Almighty God who has given me the joy of this moment. *To all of you who have come here to welcome me with characteristic African hospitality I am truly grateful.* I thank Your Excellency and the Bishops for inviting me to Uganda, and I ask God to reward all who have worked to make this visit possible.

2. I come to Uganda with deep affection for all her people. My journey brings me here at a significant turning-point in her development. This is a period of reconstruction, not just of the economy but especially of the moral fibre of the nation. No one can ignore *the considerable challenges that must be faced*, but you are already showing that Ugandans, drawing above all on their own rich human resources, are fully capable of *making this land a peaceful, secure home for everyone.*

All Ugandans are called to put aside the conflicts of the past, *to seek reconciliation with one another, and to work together to build a society in which the dignity of the human person and*

respect for human rights will be the norm of conduct for all. In this great endeavour the Catholic Church will continue to play her part, in accordance with her religious nature and mission, in effective and generous cooperation with all sectors of the population.

As with all my journeys, this visit has an eminently religious and pastoral purpose. It is the visit of the Bishop of Rome, the Successor of Saint Peter, to the local Churches in this land. As the one entrusted with the care of the universal Church I feel a special responsibility towards the young Churches of Africa. As often as possible I have tried to visit them, *praying with them and rejoicing in their fresh vitality and joy-filled fidelity to the Lord.* On these visits it is my concern to strengthen the faith of my Catholic brothers and sisters (cf. Lk. 22:32), and to encourage their unity in the one Gospel of Jesus Christ who died for our sins and rose again as the promise of new life (cf. Rom. 4:25). I look forward to celebrating, in Kampala, in Gulu, in Kasese, in Soroti, the grace of our adoption as God's beloved children (cf. 1 Jn. 3:1-2).

I also wish *to extend the hand of friendship to the Christians of other confessions*, to whom we are linked by being grafted on to Christ through the grace of Baptism. Be assured, dear Friends, of the Catholic Church's firm commitment to the growth of ecumenical understanding and cooperation. To the followers of the other religious traditions too I offer my cordial greetings and good wishes.

3. I return to Africa at *a decisive moment.* A world divided into opposing economic and military blocs is being replaced by a world increasingly affected by a distressing imbalance between a developed North and a struggling South. As a new structure of international relationships emerges, it is vital for the cause of world peace and justice that *Africa should be given its proper place.* Is it a vain hope to think that this visit, in its own way, might serve to keep before public opinion the developed world's responsibilities towards Africa? Neglect must not follow the former exploitation. It would indeed be tragic if this Continent, after enduring the unspeakable sufferings of the slave trade, the evil effects of colonialism and, more recently, the sad experiences of civil war, subservience to fruitless ideologies or misguided policies, should now be denied the help it needs in order to take its destiny into its own hands. Surely the nations of Africa *have a right to expect disinterested help in securing genuine independence*, so that at last they will be able to build their own future in their own way.

Yes, Africa, based on its noblest cultural values and traditions, can find in itself the strength and inspiration to develop in solidarity, harmony and justice. My prayer and hope is that *Africans will help one another to progress towards a better life, a freer and more brotherly life on this Continent.* This is my firm conviction: that such progress is possible, and that the Church which I represent can greatly contribute to it. I am convinced that Africa's well-being is supremely important to the world, for *what you have to offer is decisive: a sense of man, a sense of God.* For me, therefore, this visit means drawing attention to this Continent, and to the problems it forcefully sets before us: poverty and need, the terrible human cost of chronic conflict, the plight of millions of displaced persons, and yet an abiding sense of the spiritual dimension of man, of human dignity and respect

for people.

4. Mister President, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Friends: My pilgrimage has brought me to the *Uganda of the Martyrs*. May the freedom to profess one's faith, to which the martyrs' sacrifice bore the supreme witness, be the guarantee of every citizen's right and duty to share effectively in the nation's life. May the *vital relationship with God, so characteristic of African culture—the opposite of a materialism which ends in slavery to selfish individualism—sustain you all in serving the common good, in building society on strong ethical principles, in opening your hearts to the suffering and needy among you. May your faith in God inspire you to give the best of yourselves to the construction of a new and better Uganda, where justice and peace will reign.*

Nsanyuse nnyo okubalaba.

Katonda Kitaffe abakuume,

Era akuume Uganda

(I am very glad to see you.)

(May God our Father bless you, and may he bless Uganda).

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