



The Holy See

PASTORAL JOURNEY
TO BENIN, UGANDA AND KHARTOUM (SUDAN)

MEETING WITH THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS
ACCREDITED TO UGANDA

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II*

Apostolic Nunciature of Kampala (Uganda)
Monday, 8 February 1993

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. It gives me great pleasure to meet the Ambassadors and personnel of the *diplomatic missions* and international organizations *in Uganda*. Gatherings such as this one have become a normal part of my journeys to the many nations which I have visited in the years of my Pontificate, I appreciate having such opportunities to share some of the Holy See's concerns with men and women dedicated, as you are, to fostering understanding and cooperation among the world's peoples. I am grateful to your Dean, Ambassador Kanyarushoke of Rwanda, for his kind remarks, and I assure him of my prayerful best wishes for stable peace in his own country.

My journeys, as the Successor of Saint Peter and head of the Catholic Church, have a primarily pastoral aim. This meeting with you today is not out of harmony with that purpose. I come to you as a friend, a friend who wishes to encourage you in your difficult tasks. I come as a friend of *Africa, in solidarity with the men and women of this Continent at this time of change*, when new possibilities for human development are emerging but when new threats to peace also loom on the horizon. They, like peoples everywhere, want peace and a dignified life for themselves and their children. But Africa today presents urgent challenges to all who in any way direct the course of world events. These challenges must be met if the international community is to make real progress in building a more just and humane world, established on the firm foundation of respect

for human dignity and human rights. I refer in particular to the need to put an end to *armed conflicts*, to provide *food* for the victims of famine, and to care for the multitude of *refugees*.

2. Each of these problems is a source of profound anxiety. But they can be *rightly considered together*, for each is both a cause and an effect of the others. In Africa, hunger is seldom the result of natural climatic conditions alone. It is often the result of social disintegration caused by conflict. And among the victims of war and famine are those forced to abandon their homes and seek shelter elsewhere. The cumulative result has been a mass scattering of men, women and children throughout Africa during these last years of the twentieth century: the figures of six million refugees and another sixteen million persons displaced within their own countries are the commonly quoted statistics. The sufferings of these millions give rise to more wars, more starvation, more refugees – more suffering and death.

Various examples could be quoted. In particular my thoughts turn to the next stage of my pilgrimage, which will take me to the Sudan. Conditions do not allow a full Pastoral Visit to the Catholic community of that country. Nevertheless in visiting the Capital City I wish to raise my voice in support of peace and justice for all the Sudanese people, and to comfort my brothers and sisters in the faith, so many of whom are affected by the conflict going on in the South. That dispute is largely the result of the quest for nationhood in a country where there are great differences between the North and the South – racial, cultural, linguistic and religious differences which cannot be ignored and which must be taken into account. Only a sincere dialogue, open to the legitimate claims of all parties, can build a framework of real justice in which all can work together for the true good of their country and its people. I pray that in some way my visit may contribute to such a dialogue.

3. Those who are concerned with Africa's welfare, both as national leaders and as directors of international affairs, should spare no effort to *ensure immediate relief* to the victims of war, famine and displacement. All must work to stop these evils from spreading and to bring an end to them. In principle almost everyone agrees that violence must give way to dialogue, food must never be used as a weapon, and the unimpeded distribution of humanitarian aid must be recognized as the right of all who suffer. But the passage from declarations of principle and good intent to concrete achievements is often an arduous one. It is here that I appeal to you, distinguished Friends, to do all you can to make solidarity ever more effective. In the face of the grave trials besetting this Continent, those who love Africa, whether Africans themselves or true friends of Africa, deserve all our *encouragement and gratitude*.

At the same time we should gladly *acknowledge* everything that is being done to offer *assistance to so many needy populations*. Praise is due to the families and villages, the communities of believers, the regions and nations in Africa which have so generously extended hospitality to the dispossessed, at no little cost to themselves. In particular I pay heartfelt tribute to the missionaries and the staffs of International Relief Organizations, who labour heroically in the service of their

less fortunate brothers and sisters. And who can measure the merits of so many dedicated men and women engaged in health-care? The injuries inflicted on the bodies and minds of Africans by violence, hunger and displacement will take long to heal. And yet, in many places medical services are at a bare minimum, and the alarming spread of AIDS could easily push them beyond the breaking point. Here, one must appeal to the developed nations and to voluntary organizations to *come to the aid of the sick in Africa!*

4. On another level refreshing *signs of hope are not lacking*. The initiatives promoting more democratic government are particularly gratifying, for most often they reflect a growth of respect for human dignity and for the rights and duties which flow from it (Cf. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 46). The peoples of Africa are struggling to recapture the positive traditional values and the supportive social structures which have been eroded in recent years. They are seeking new ways of adapting their heritage to life in the next century. Are we witnessing a recovery of that optimism for building sound societies which accompanied the transition from colonialism to independence? Is Africa experiencing a second birth of freedom? This is certainly my profound hope. And in this enterprise the peoples of this Continent deserve the fraternal support of all men and women of good will.

What must be the *foundation and guiding-principle* of this vast enterprise? In the first place, the *transcendent worth of every human person*. In the new Africa now coming to birth this means that there is no place for exploitation or for discrimination based on ethnic or tribal differences. In the Africa of the future there should be no room for schemes which seek to fabricate national unity by forcing *minorities* to assimilate the culture or religion of the majority. Such a "community" would be counterfeit, not deserving of the name. And as one sprung from the soil of the Old Continent, Europe, I must testify from conviction confirmed by experience: false unity leads only to tragedy. In this regard, *religious liberty* must everywhere be respected, since the right freely to practise one's religion is in fact the cornerstone of all human rights (Cf. John Paul II, *Message for the World Day of Peace 1988*, 8 December 1987).

In the Africa which we long to see, nations and ethnic groups will build bridges of mutual respect, not walls of suspicion and fear; no child's dignity will be denied because he or she belongs to a certain ethnic group, for every child will be respected as a member of the human family. This is the Africa for which we pray, an Africa of Africans working together, in solidarity with one another, to build a better future.

5. But *who* is to solve Africa's problems? No doubt the peoples of Africa themselves must bear the responsibility of building their own future. There is a growing conviction that *African problems must have African solutions*. How could it be otherwise? Could they again accept subjection to subtle forms of economic or political colonialism which, though not *de iure*, would be nonetheless real? No, Africa could never accept a new colonialism. Its nations are independent, and must remain so. This does not mean that help from other members of the family of nations is not needed and

desired. On the contrary, help is needed now more than ever. But to be truly effective, *it must reflect a relationship not of subjection but of interdependence.*

In this context, the unsolved problem of the *foreign debt* of the poorer countries of Africa and of the whole developing world deserves serious attention. As I have written elsewhere: "It cannot be expected that the debts which have been contracted should be paid at the price of unbearable sacrifices" (Cf. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 35).

Long-term assistance is equally important. Such aid should aim at *helping the peoples of Africa to face*, by themselves, the *deeper causes of their underdevelopment*. This is true solidarity: when one people shares with another the knowledge which enables the latter to become an equal partner in the task of producing the material and cultural assets which sustain adequate standards of living. And in this regard, high illiteracy rates are a special concern, for the data clearly point to a deficiency in a skill which is absolutely basic for living a fully human life.

The aspiration of millions of human beings was well described by the Second Vatican Council: "Man as an individual and as a member of society craves a life that is full, autonomous and worthy of his nature as a human being; he longs to harness for his own welfare the immense resources of the modern world"! (*Gaudium et Spes*, 9)

6. Ladies and Gentlemen: in our day, the development of the means of social communications and progress towards a world economy have increased to a remarkable degree the *mutual dependence of nations*. Today therefore the service rendered by diplomats and statesmen must look beyond the boundaries of their own national interests. A paramount *aim of diplomacy* is to work towards a social order which will be just and will bring peace and prosperity to all the peoples of the earth. It is clearer than ever that the good of every individual society exists as part of the common good of the whole international community (Cf. John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, 130). You therefore are truly *servants of the cause of universal justice, peace and development*. This worthy aim is also the reason for the Holy See's continued participation in international diplomacy and for its support of all efforts which advance the cause of peace. Men and women of good will have a right to expect no less from those who testify that their Lord is the Prince of Peace.

It is my fervent hope that Almighty God, whose Providence guides the destiny of nations, will sustain you in your work as peace-makers. I pray especially that he will strengthen you and all those who exercise leadership in public affairs to work tirelessly for the good of all the peoples of this Continent.

May the God of peace watch over you and your families. May he abundantly bless the nations you represent. May he protect the peoples of Africa, especially the citizens of Uganda, our kind hosts and dear friends.

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