



The Holy See

PASTORAL JOURNEY
TO BENIN, UGANDA AND KHARTOUM (SUDAN)

MEETING WITH GENERAL OMAR HASSAN AHMED AL-BASHIR
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE SUDAN

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

*Friendship Hall, Khartoum (Sudan)
Wednesday, 10 February 1993*

Your Excellency,

1. My visit to the Sudan is a source of great satisfaction to me in the fulfilment of my religious and pastoral ministry as the Bishop of Rome, the head of the Catholic Church. I am happy to have been able to come to Khartoum, even if it was not possible to consider a more extended visit to other parts of the country, in order to offer the *message of reconciliation and hope* which is at the heart of Catholicism and which I bring to all the Sudanese people, irrespective of differences of religion or ethnic origin. I have looked forward especially to the opportunity to give encouragement to the citizens of this country who are sons and daughters of the Church, and whose deeply-felt aspiration is to cooperate harmoniously and effectively with their fellow-citizens in building a better society for all Sudanese.

2. Just recently, in my New Year Address to the members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, representing one hundred and forty-five countries, I voiced my concern over the many obstacles to peace and progress which still blight the international horizon. Regarding Africa, I made a point of reaffirming that "urgent aid is essential in several areas of conflict or of natural disasters" (John Paul II, *Address to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See*, 2, 16 January 1993). I also felt the need to make specific reference to the war which continues to set the peoples of the North and South of the Sudan against each other. I expressed the sincere hope

"that the Sudanese, with the freedom to choose, will succeed in finding a constitutional formula which will make it possible to overcome contradictions and struggles, with proper respect paid to the specific characteristics of each community" (Ibid.).

Your Excellency, *this is the hope which I renew here today*. It is a hope born of confidence, for peace is always possible. Man is a rational being endowed with intelligence and will, and therefore he is capable of finding just solutions to situations of conflict, no matter how long they have been going on and no matter how intricate the motives which caused them. Efforts to restore harmony depend on the parties involved being willing and determined to implement the conditions required for peace. But where constructive action does not follow declarations of principle, violence can become uncontrollable. A noteworthy example in Europe is the conflict in the Balkans; in Asia, Cambodia and the Middle East; in Africa, the tragic situation of Liberia.

3. The building-blocks of peace were succinctly indicated by the Sudanese Bishops themselves when they said: "Peace without justice and respect for human rights cannot be achieved" (Sudanese Bishops, *Communicatus*, 6 October 1992). In a multiracial and multicultural country, a strategy of confrontation can never bring peace and progress. Only a legally guaranteed respect for human rights in a system of equal justice for all can create the right conditions for peaceful coexistence and cooperation in serving the common good. My hope for your country can therefore be expressed more concretely in a heartfelt desire to see all its citizens—without discrimination based upon ethnic origin, cultural background, social standing or religious conviction—take a responsible part in the life of the Nation, with their diversity contributing to the richness of the whole national community.

4. Ever since the establishment of Nation–States, the existence of minorities within the same territory has presented a positive challenge and an opportunity for a richer social development. At a time of growing awareness of the importance of *respect for human rights* as the basis of a just and peaceful world, the question of the respect due to minorities must be faced seriously, especially by political and religious leaders.

In the course of this century, extremely negative experiences in relation to the treatment of minorities, especially in Europe but also elsewhere, have led the international community to react strongly and to enshrine in international accords the rights of such groups. The translation of intent into law and behaviour in each nation is the measure of that country's maturity, and the guarantee of its capacity to foster peaceful coexistence within its own borders and to contribute to peace in the world.

5. The Church approaches this question from an eminently moral and humanitarian point of view. Two fundamental principles underlie the universal obligation to understand and respect the variety and richness of other peoples, societies, cultures and religions.

First, the inalienable dignity of every human person, irrespective of racial, ethnic, cultural or national origin or religious belief, means that when people coalesce in groups they have a right to enjoy a collective identity. Thus, minorities within a country have the right to exist, with their own language, culture and traditions, and the State is morally obliged to leave room for their identity and self-expression. Secondly, the fundamental unity of the human race, which takes its origin from God the Creator of all, requires that no group should consider itself superior to another. It likewise requires that integration should be built on effective solidarity and freedom from discrimination.

Consequently, the State has a duty to respect and defend the differences existing among its citizens, and to permit their diversity to serve the common good. Experience shows that peace and internal security can only be guaranteed through respect for the rights of all those for whom the State has responsibility.

In such a perspective, the freedom of individuals and communities *to profess and practise their religion* is an essential element for peaceful human coexistence. Freedom of conscience and freedom to seek the truth and to act according to one's personal religious beliefs are so fundamentally human that any effort to restrict them almost inevitably leads to bitter conflict.

Where relations between groups within a Nation have broken down, dialogue and negotiation are the obligatory paths to peace. Reconciliation in accordance with justice, and respect for the legitimate aspirations of all sectors of the national community must be the rule. To guarantee the participation of minorities in political life is a sign of a morally mature society, and brings honour upon those nations in which all citizens are free to share in national life in a climate of justice and peace.

6. Your Excellency, these are some of the thoughts which my visit leads me to express. I would draw your attention and the attention of the members of the Government to the sentiments which inspire the Catholic Church's activity in every part of the world, sentiments which I stated recently to the representatives of all the countries having diplomatic relations with the Holy See: "The Catholic Church, present in every nation of the earth, and the Holy See, a member of the international community, in no way wish to impose judgments or precepts, but merely to give the witness of their concept of man and history, which they know comes from a divine Revelation.... Despite difficulties, the Catholic Church for her part will continue to offer her disinterested cooperation so that at the end of this century man will be better enlightened and able to free himself from the idols of this age. Christians' only ambition is to show that they understand personal and collective history as a meeting between God and mankind" (John Paul II, *Address to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See*, 7, 16 January 1993).

At this point my good wishes for the Sudan become *an earnest prayer that God's gift of peace will become a reality in your midst*, that harmony and cooperation between North and South, between

Christians and Muslims, will take the place of conflict, that obstacles to religious freedom will soon be a thing of the past. May the Most High God lead all the Sudanese along the paths of truth, justice and peace.

Baraka Allah as-Sudan

(God bless the Sudan.)