



The Holy See

***DISCOURS DU SAINT-PÈRE JEAN-PAUL II
À S.Exc. M. DENIS POLISI, NOUVEL AMBASSADEUR
DU RWANDA PRÈS LE SAINT-SIÈGE****

Samedi 25 mars 1995

Mr. Ambassador,

I welcome you here, where I have the pleasure of greeting Your Excellency on the occasion of the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Rwanda to the Holy See.

Of course, we would have liked this ceremony to take place in an absolutely peaceful atmosphere, recollecting the friendly meetings with your compatriots in your country during my Pastoral Visit to the «land of a thousand hills» in September 1990. Alas, the tragedy Rwanda has been through last year remains in our minds and to this day leaves an impression of great sadness in our souls. Even today we are left with its widespread consequences, millions of refugees and serious damage to the country's social and economic fabric. On the eve of the anniversary of the outbreak of the massacre, I pray to God that spirits may once more find true peace so that the tragedy of 1994 may never be repeated.

As you have pointed out, Mr. Ambassador, it is now important to turn resolutely and confidently towards the future, and I can only subscribe entirely to the invitation you mentioned in your address: that of a great coming together of all Rwandans in sincere reconciliation.

The Holy See's appeals on behalf of your badly scarred country and the special messengers sent to your citizens in distress, to whom you referred in your address, were motivated by the single wish to help put an end to the horror and absurdity of violence, to restore peace to hearts and to inspire a vast movement of reconciliation on a national scale, so that the land of Rwanda, whose ground I kissed when I arrived in Kigali, may never again be soaked with the blood of its children.

You said vividly: «The Hutu have lost in the dead Tutsi, as the Tutsi have lost in the dead Hutu». May Hutu and Tutsi be winners only in the future, by living together as brothers, conscious of the Creator's priceless gift of human life, for which I intend forcefully to awaken esteem and respect in my forthcoming Encyclical Letter *The Gospel of Life*.

I am particularly pleased to hear you say, Mr. Ambassador, that «the Rwandan Government trusts deeply in the Catholic Church», and I have certainly taken note of its commitment to collaborate with her in achieving the ideals of reconciliation, peace and progress. With a large number of her sons and daughters killed in atrocious conditions, she has suffered a cruel contradiction to her love for God and her desire to render selfless service to Rwandan men and women. The evil which raged last year in Rwanda and which is still rampant today in other countries where the Church is present far from signifying the failure of Catholicism, shows that in accordance with words of St Paul, «the mystery of lawlessness is at work» (2 Thes 2:7).

I ardently wish that the sacrifice of so many victims may herald days of peace and happiness for all your nation's inhabitants. In my prayers, I offer the Lord their expectations and hopes, and once again, I ask God to spare them as well as the inhabitants of the neighbouring countries all further suffering. I make the wish that the international community will show more and more solidarity. I also hope that Gospel workers may be increasingly present so that by virtue of their ministry, the lordship of Christ may overthrow that of the evil one (cf. 2 Thes 2:4).

By reason of their Baptism and motivated by an ever more enlightened faith, the faithful of the Catholic Church, as you know, desire to make a contribution directed towards building up society by zealously and faithfully fulfilling their earthly tasks and by co-operating in the nation's progress with believers of other Christian creeds or of other religions. As I said in Kigali at my meeting with the employees and intellectuals who serve the nation, the lay person is at once a member of the People of God and of the human city. There is only one Christian conscience to guide him in the two domains and it urges him to imbue temporal realities with Gospel leaven.

May I be permitted, Mr. Ambassador, to address my affectionate greetings to the beloved Catholic community through you. From my heart I urge all its members to participate actively in tearing down the barriers of hatred that might still exist and in courageously practicing the command of fraternal love, bequeathed by Christ to those who want to be called his own.

As you begin your mission, I offer you my best wishes, and I assure you that you will always find an attentive welcome here and cordial understanding from those who work with me.

I fervently invoke upon Your Excellency and all the families of Rwanda, especially those who are still suffering or who are living outside their homeland, the comfort and support of the God of peace.

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