



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. Mr DON PRAMUDWINAI, NEW AMBASSADOR
OF THAILAND TO THE HOLY SEE***

Saturday, 25 March 1995

Mr Ambassador,

I am pleased to welcome you to the Vatican today and to accept the Letters of Credence by which His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej appoints you Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Thailand to the Holy See. I am also happy to receive the kind greetings which you bring from His Majesty, and I would ask you to convey to him the assurance of my gratitude and my good wishes for his health.

Your Excellency has made reference to the long and cordial relationship existing between the Kingdom of Thailand and the Holy See. This friendship is sustained in large measure by your country's tradition of religious freedom, a freedom of which the King is himself the guarantor. The Catholic Church for her part has a deep and abiding respect for the spiritual and cultural values which the world's other great religions enshrine. In particular, I would like to reaffirm the Church's highest regard for the followers of Buddhism, the majority religion in Thailand.

It is the rich spiritual patrimony of your people, their openness to all genuine religious belief and practice, which has enabled the Catholic Church to make many contributions to Thai society, especially in the fields of education, healthcare and the social services. The Church rejoices when all sectors of the population join hands and hearts in building a society truly sensitive to the dignity and rights of every human being, and effectively committed to the cause of justice, authentic freedom and solidarity.

It is certainly this kind of co-operation and unity which our modern world needs so desperately, not only in order to overcome the violence, bloodshed and injustices which still afflict and oppress

individuals, groups and peoples round the globe (cf. John Paul II, *Message for the World Day of Peace 1995*, 1 [8 Dec. 1994]), but also to come to the assistance of those fleeing these unbearable conditions. One of my most moving memories of my visit to Thailand almost eleven years ago is of the Refugee Camp at Phanat Nikhom, where I met men, women and children who not only had had to abandon their homes, their livelihood and all that they possessed, but who had been deprived in a very real way of their dignity and self-esteem. Looking into the faces of so many thousands of suffering human beings, I thought of the millions more elsewhere in similar situations. And sadly this is still the case today; this is the heartbreaking drama which is being played out not only in South-east Asia but in Africa, Europe, and the Americas.

For many years now, Thailand has been the country of first asylum for thousands of refugees from neighbouring countries. The Government and citizens of Thailand have been particularly generous towards these people. It is my hope that Thailand and other countries which respond similarly to the plight of refugees will continue to offer practical solidarity to these people living on the verge of despair.

At the same time, the international community at large must focus its attention on long-range political solutions to this complex problem. Above all it is necessary to create genuine conditions for peace: trust and reconciliation between nations; harmony between the various economic, social and ethnic groups within nations; and unity within each of these groups themselves. There is a pressing need for the international community to work to build a secure future for all peoples: a future based on juridically guaranteed respect for the dignity and rights of every individual and on solidarity which goes beyond borders, races and ideologies.

The Holy See for its part willingly works with all men and women of good will towards this end. This is in fact an essential purpose of the Holy See's presence and activity in the international arena and reflects the spirit in which formal diplomatic relations between the Holy See and national governments are established and maintained.

Mr Ambassador, as you begin your mission as the Representative of the Kingdom of Thailand to the Holy See, I offer you my good wishes for success. I assure you that the various offices of the Roman Curia will extend to you every consideration as you fulfil your duties. I am confident that the friendship and understanding which has been built up over the years will continue to grow, to the mutual benefit of the Church and your country. Upon yourself, upon Their Majesties the King and Queen and upon all the people of Thailand I cordially invoke abundant divine blessings.

**Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. XVIII, 1 p.847-849.

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