



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. Mr. WOLDEMICHAEL ABRAHA
NEW AMBASSADOR OF THE STATE OF ERITREA TO THE HOLY SEE***

Thursday, 18 December 1997

Mr Ambassador, It is my pleasure to accept the Letters of Credence by which you are appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the State of Eritrea to the Holy See. I am also happy to receive the greetings which you bring from His Excellency President Isaias Afwerki, and I would ask you kindly to convey to him my own prayerful good wishes for your country and the well-being of its people. Your Excellency has referred to Eritrea's commitment to ensure peace and harmony within its own borders and to work with other nations in making peace a reality in your region. In this endeavour your country will find a ready partner in the Catholic Church which everywhere proclaims the Gospel message of truth, justice and peace. The Church and the political community, each in its own sphere, are independent and self-governing. Yet each also serves the personal and social vocation of the same human beings. Although they live in a finite period of history, men and women are not restricted to the temporal sphere. They are called to transcendence. This lofty calling and sublime destiny of the human person should be an important element in shaping the social, economic and political undertakings of individuals, peoples and nations. It is out of fidelity to the Gospel and concern for the human person that the Church in Eritrea is involved in the fields of education, health-care and social service. In this way she seeks to contribute to the continuing development of your people, especially during this time of reconstruction and democratization after a devastating war. In this regard, I gratefully note Your Excellency's kind words of recognition for all that the Church has done and continues to do in the building up of Eritrean society. As you know, last year the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations sponsored a World Food Summit here in Rome. The question at issue was the need to ensure worldwide food security, especially in the face of the tragic consequences of drought and hunger in various parts of the globe. During the previous decade, terrible famines visited great disaster upon the peoples in your part of Africa, and food shortages of more recent years continue to cause hardship and death. Throughout the world there are still hundreds of millions of people who suffer from malnutrition, and no immediate solution has yet been forthcoming. For this reason, the need is ever more urgent, as I said to the participants at the World Food Summit, for all people to work together in order to find a remedy to this situation, "so that we will no longer have, side by side, . . . the starving and the wealthy, . . . those who lack the necessary means and others who lavishly waste them" (*Address to the World Food Summit in Rome*, 13 November 1996, No. 2). Any effort to solve this problem demands economic and political decisions made by governmental bodies, both national and international, aimed at encouraging and enhancing

local agricultural production while at the same time protecting farmland and conserving natural resources. Aid to developing countries and procedures for determining fair trade terms and credit agreements should go hand in hand with a strategy for the effective sharing of technological advancements and the appropriate training of people, so that these countries themselves will be the agents of their own progress. It is precisely the promotion of such cooperation between States that is one of the main objectives of the Holy See's activity in the field of international diplomacy, a cooperation based on the utmost respect for human dignity and concern for the needs of the less fortunate. A concerted effort on the part of all peoples and nations is required. In this regard, the developed world has a clear responsibility towards Africa, not just for historical reasons but also because peace cannot be genuinely had by some unless it is shared by all. A new sense of solidarity with Africa is needed, especially in caring for the great number of displaced persons and refugees, and in the fight against the AIDS epidemic. But this assistance should fully respect the specific social and cultural structures and traditions of Africa, since Africans themselves must be the builders of their own future. Mr Ambassador, as you assume your responsibilities within the diplomatic community accredited to the Holy See, I offer you my good wishes for the success of your high mission. I assure you that the various offices of the Holy See will always be ready to assist you in the fulfilment of your duties. I cordially invoke upon you and upon the beloved people of Eritrea the abundant blessings of Almighty

God.

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