



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO NEW AMBASSADORS TO THE HOLY SEE
FROM ANDORRA, THE GAMBIA, JORDAN,
LATVIA, MADAGASCAR, UGANDA,
SWAZILAND, CHAD AND ZAMBIA***

Thursday, 28 May 1998

Your Excellencies,

1. I am pleased to receive you today and I welcome you to Rome, where you are presenting the Letters accrediting you to the Holy See as Ambassadors Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of your countries: the Principality of Andorra, whose representative I am receiving for the first time, The Gambia, Jordan, Latvia, Madagascar, Uganda, Swaziland, Chad and Zambia. On this occasion I would again like to express my cordial esteem for your national authorities and for all your compatriots. I would be grateful if you would convey to your respective Heads of State my gratitude for their messages, which I particularly appreciate. In return, I ask you to express my respectful greetings and best wishes for their persons and their lofty mission at the service of all their fellow citizens.
2. My thoughts turn first of all to Africa and especially to Nigeria, which I had the opportunity to visit last March. The warm welcome of the nation's leaders and of the entire people is a sign of this country's human resources. Like other African countries, it possesses numerous riches: in particular a sense of family, openness to foreigners and the love of dialogue and fraternal life. Relying on these pillars of African society and on the efforts of its peoples, the international community is called to increase, in a disinterested way, its aid to this continent, so that Africans can achieve on their own the progress indispensable to making the most of their lands; the various countries will thus become better integrated into world economic networks and attain the social development to which they legitimately aspire today.
3. In a perspective often developed by the Church's social teaching, solidarity must proceed to a thorough revision or outright cancellation of the debt of the world's poorest countries. *Caritas Internationalis* which, with other Catholic organizations, is involved in initiatives of charity and solidarity in the developing countries, has recently shown at an

opportune time that an excessive debt affects the rights of individuals and peoples, as well as the dignity of persons. In the past, the decision to cancel the debt has allowed countries in a difficult and precarious situation to find their way to economic progress, democratic life and greater economic stability. I therefore invite the wealthier countries to reconsider their relations with poorer countries, which all too often are still impoverished, especially because of the external debt that keeps them in a situation of dependence on other nations and leaves them no opportunity to govern themselves as they wish, nor to make the necessary reforms and changes.

In the same way, the leaders of poor countries should strive to develop harmoniously all the national institutions. In carrying out their responsibilities, their principal goal must be to seek to serve all their compatriots, without distinction or partisanship, out of love for their country, for the people who live there and are welcomed there, for the sake of the moral, spiritual and social growth of all. The administration of the *res publica* thus presupposes great concern for all citizens, particularly the weakest and those who are the most seriously affected by a difficult economic situation; this also requires that priority be given to dialogue between the nation's various members, whose efforts must contribute to the prosperity of the whole people. The institutional authorities must strive for a healthy administration of public life, for which they are accountable to God and to the people. These responsibilities also require true self-denial, so that the sense of service to their brothers and sisters will continue to prevail, that the principles of democratic life will be manifest and that the values on which the *civitas* is based will be practised.

4. The primary objective of political leaders is also to achieve true peace, which cannot be the mere absence of armed conflict. It is a question of harmonious coexistence, in which all constituents of the nation build civil society together, with respect for legitimate individual freedoms. Those responsible for directing the destiny of peoples are specifically called to create an atmosphere of trust among their compatriots, with concern for the common good and great moral rectitude. In this way all the individuals who live in the same territory will be able to coexist, without preferences or privileges. Indeed, discrimination of any kind is always to the detriment of the weakest and gravely threatens social harmony and peace.

5. I can only hope for the renewed commitment of the international community on behalf of countries which are faced with important economic and political problems, making international relations fragile. Conflicts and wars are never the way that one can hope will lead to the resolution of tension within a nation or between States, nor to legitimate prosperity. They are always seriously damaging to the population and cannot help citizens to trust either their institutions or their brothers and sisters. They can only give rise to an escalation of violence. To leave violence behind means recognizing differences, which are sources of wealth and dynamism, by being willing to link one's future to that of one's brothers and sisters. Once again, I address a heartfelt appeal to all nations: no more massacres or wars, which disfigure man and humanity. No more discriminatory measures towards part of the people, which marginalize individuals because of their opinions or religious beliefs or exclude them from any participation in national affairs.

6. I would also like to stress the importance of pursuing civil and moral education, especially with youth, who will be called to take an active part in the future life of the nation. I therefore invite the authorities to take special care of their youth, who are a country's primary wealth. Many young people are caught up in a spiral of violence, recruited by armed groups, taken hostage by groups of fighters, plunged into drug trafficking or subjected to degrading situations. They will be scarred by these for life and will have great difficulty in regaining their place in society. It is also to be feared that they feed the spiral of violence. In educating youth, national leaders are preparing important social developments in their

county. I urge the international community to persevere in the aid it donates to countries involved in a revitalized education for their youth, even if this is sometimes done at the price of heavy sacrifices and amid numerous difficulties.

7. For her part, the Church hopes to continue her essential work of proclaiming the Gospel, with respect for local traditions and the other spiritual practices that exist in various countries. She is also concerned to offer her help to countries and local peoples without restrictions or compensation, through humanitarian and social programmes, thanks to the clergy and faithful who freely devote themselves to the service of their brothers and sisters in the institutions belonging to her or in national or international organizations.

8. During your mission to the Apostolic See, you will have the opportunity to discover more directly the activities and concerns of the Church on every continent. Two weeks ago, the *Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops* ended in Rome; it was a moment of intense communion between the different Catholic communities, gathered round the Successor of Peter. The Pastors echoed the difficulties their countries are currently undergoing, particularly with regard to human rights; they also recounted the spiritual and human dynamism of millions of people. Therefore, as I hope you will have many opportunities to become aware of the Church's universality through these events, I invoke an abundance of divine blessings upon you and your families, on your staffs and upon the nations you represent.

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