



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR OF IRAQ
TO THE HOLY SEE***

Saturday, 28 April 2001

Mr Ambassador,

I am pleased to welcome you to the Vatican and to accept the Letters of Credence appointing you Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Iraq to the Holy See. I wish you to know of my esteem for the Iraqi people, whom I remember daily in my prayers, especially in light of the continuing difficulties which they face. As the embargo in your country continues to claim victims, I renew my appeal to the international community that innocent people should not be made to pay the consequences of a destructive war whose effects are still being felt by those who are weakest and most vulnerable.

You have referred, Mr Ambassador, to the Holy See's presence in the international community and its efforts to serve the worldwide human family. Indeed, the Holy See seeks that "wholesome mutual cooperation" (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 76) between the Church and the political community which benefits individuals, peoples, nations and the world at large. Today's world, in fact, although sadly afflicted in many regions by tension, violence and armed conflict, is seeking greater equity and stability so that the whole human family can live in true justice and lasting peace. These are not abstract concepts or remote ideals, rather they are values which dwell in the heart of every individual and nation, to which all peoples have a right.

It is precisely the pursuit of this justice and this peace which is the driving force behind every activity of the Holy See in the area of international diplomacy. While it is true that the present world situation — with disease, poverty, injustice and war still causing much suffering and hardship — could lead one to doubt the ability of the international community to heal the world's ills, the Holy

See firmly believes, as I had occasion to remark earlier this year, "that without social solidarity or recourse to law and the instruments of international diplomacy, these terrible situations would be even more dramatic and could become unresolvable" (*Address to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See*, 13 January 2001, 1).

Thousands of years of human history have clearly shown that humanity in every age is tempted to construct "a self-enclosed world in an attitude of self-sufficiency, domination, power and pride" (*ibid.*, No. 6). The Holy See therefore sees as one of its chief duties that of reminding public opinion that "no authority, no political programme and no ideology is entitled to reduce human beings to what they can do or produce" (*ibid.*, No. 7). The inalienable rights and personal dignity of every human being must be upheld, the transcendent dimension of the human person must be defended. "Even if some are reluctant to refer to the religious dimension of human beings and human history, even if others want to consign religion to the private sphere, even if believing communities are persecuted, Christians will still proclaim that religious experience is part of human experience. It is a vital element in shaping the person and the society to which people belong" (*ibid.*).

In this context, my thoughts turn naturally to the members of the Iraqi Catholic community. Together with their Muslim countrymen, Iraqi Christians wish to work for unity and harmony. Their Christian faith and values inspire them to cultivate a spirit of mutual respect, with pride in their national identity and concern for the progress of their country. In Iraq, as in the world at large, dialogue between Christians and Muslims is more necessary than ever. Through such dialogue, believers will be enabled to respond positively to the call to respect one another, to rise above all discrimination and to serve the common good in a spirit of brotherhood and understanding. In like manner, it is the obligation of every government to ensure that the equality of all citizens before the law is never violated for religious reasons, whether openly or covertly.

Mr Ambassador, with the long experience and high qualifications which you bring to your duties, I am confident that your term of service will do much to strengthen the bonds of friendship between your Government and the Holy See. I offer you my best wishes for the success of your mission and assure you of every assistance in fulfilling your responsibilities. Upon yourself and the beloved Iraqi people I cordially invoke the manifold blessings of the Most High God.

**Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. XXIV, 1 p.807-809.

L'Osservatore Romano 29.4.2001 p.6.

L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly edition in English n. 20 p.7.

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