



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. MR. ODED BEN-HUR
NEW AMBASSADOR OF ISRAEL TO THE HOLY SEE***

Monday 2 June 2003

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 State of Israel to the Holy See. Your presence here today is a testimony to our common desire to work together to build a world of peace and security, not only in Israel and the Middle East, but in every part of the globe, for all peoples everywhere. This is a task which we undertake not alone but with the whole international community: indeed, perhaps unlike any time in the past, the entire human family today feels the urgent need to overcome violence and terror, to expunge intolerance and fanaticism, to usher in an era of justice, reconciliation and harmony among individuals, groups and nations. This need is probably nowhere more acutely felt than in the Holy Land. There is absolutely no question that peoples and nations have the inherent right to live in security. This right, however, entails a corresponding duty: to respect the right of others. Therefore, just as violence and terror can never be an acceptable means for making political statements, neither can retaliation ever lead to a just and lasting peace. Acts of terrorism are always to be condemned as true crimes against humanity (cf. [Message for the 2002 World Day of Peace](#), 4). Every State has the undeniable right to defend itself against terrorism, but this right must always be exercised with respect for moral and legal limits in its ends and means (cf. *ibid.*, 5). Like other members of the international community, and fully supporting the role and efforts of the larger family of nations in helping to resolve the crisis in the Middle East, the Holy See is convinced that the present conflict will be resolved only when there are two independent and sovereign States. As I said earlier this year to the Diplomatic Corps: "Two peoples, Israeli and Palestinian, are called to live side-by-side, equally free and sovereign, in mutual respect" ([Speech to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See](#), 13 January 2003, 4). It is essential that both parties give clear signs of their determined commitment to bring this peaceful coexistence about. By doing so, a priceless contribution will be made towards the building of a relationship of mutual trust and cooperation. In this context, I am pleased to note the Israeli Government's recent vote in support of the peace process: for all involved in that process, the Government's position is a positive sign of hope and encouragement. Of course, the many issues and difficulties raised by this crisis must be dealt with in a fair and effective manner. Questions concerning Palestinian refugees and Israeli settlements, for example, or the problem of setting territorial boundaries and defining the status of the most sacred places of the City of Jerusalem, need to be the subject of open dialogue and sincere negotiation. By no means should a decision be made unilaterally. Rather, respect, mutual understanding and solidarity demand that the path of dialogue never be abandoned. Nor should

real or apparent failures lead the partners in dialogue and negotiation to be discouraged. On the contrary, it is precisely in such circumstances that "it is all the more necessary that they should consent to begin again ceaselessly to propose true dialogue, by removing obstacles and by eliminating the defects of dialogue". In this way, they will walk together the path "which leads to peace, with all its demands and conditions" ([Message for the 1983 World Day of Peace](#), 5). Mr Ambassador, as you have noted, it was ten years ago that the Fundamental Agreement between the Holy see and the State of Israel was signed. It is this Agreement that paved the way for the subsequent establishment of full diplomatic relations between us and which continues to guide us in our dialogue and mutual exchange of positions regarding many issues of importance to both of us. The fact that we have been able to reach an accord on the full recognition of the legal personality of the Church's institutions is a source of satisfaction, and I am pleased that an accord also appears close at hand regarding related fiscal and economic matters. Along these same lines, I am confident that we shall be successful in drawing up useful guidelines for future cultural exchanges between us as well. I would further express the fervent hope that this climate of cooperation and friendship will allow us to deal effectively with other difficulties that the Catholic faithful in the Holy Land face on a daily basis. Many of these problems, such as access to Christian shrines and holy sites, the isolation and suffering of Christian communities, the dwindling of the Christian population due to emigration, are in some way connected to the current conflict, but that should not discourage us from seeking possible remedies now, from working now to meet these challenges. I am confident that the Catholic Church will be able to continue to promote good will among peoples and to advance the dignity of the human person in her schools and educational programmes, and through her charitable and social institutions. Overcoming the difficulties mentioned above will serve not only to enhance the contribution that the Catholic Church makes to Israeli society, but will also strengthen the guarantees of religious freedom in your country. This in turn will reinforce the feelings of equality between citizens, and each individual, inspired by his own spiritual convictions, will thus be better enabled to build up society as a common home shared by all. Three years ago, during my Jubilee Year pilgrimage to the Holy Land, I remarked that "real peace in the Middle East will come only as a result of mutual understanding and respect between all the peoples of the region: Jews, Christians and Muslims. In this perspective, my pilgrimage is a pilgrimage of hope: the hope that the 21st century will lead to a new solidarity among the peoples of the world, in the conviction that development, justice and peace will not be attained unless they are attained by all" ([Visit to Israeli President Ezer Weizman](#), 23 March 2000). It is precisely this hope and this concept of solidarity that must ever inspire all men and women — in the Holy Land and elsewhere — in working for a new world order based on harmonious relations and effective cooperation between peoples. This is mankind's task for the new millennium, this is the only way to ensure a future of promise and light for all. Your Excellency, I ask you kindly to convey to the President, Prime Minister, Government and People of the State of Israel the assurance of my prayers for the nation, especially at this critical moment in its history. I am certain that your term of service as representative to the Holy See will do much to strengthen the bonds of understanding and friendship between us. Wishing you every success in your mission, and assuring you of the full cooperation of the various offices of the Roman Curia in the fulfilment of your high duties, I cordially invoke upon you, your fellow citizens and all the peoples of the Holy Land an abundance of divine blessings.

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