



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS OF AZERBAIJAN

Thursday, 18 November 2004

Dear and Venerable Brothers,

1. I greet you with affection and address my greeting of peace to you all.

Welcome to you, Sheikh-ul-Islam, Head of the Presidency of Muslims of the Caucasus that is striving with constant abnegation to build peace in a region where, unfortunately, there are still violent conflicts.

Welcome to you, Bishop Aleksandr of Baku and the Caspian Region, who belong to the Russian Orthodox Church to which I am bound by ties of esteem and affection.

Welcome to you, Head of the Community of Mountain Jews, an ancient community that sets an example of coexistence and fraternal collaboration in a context where the vast majority are Muslim.

2. Your visit reminds me of the one that God granted me to pay to Azerbaijan in 2002. I remember the warmth with which I was welcomed, the cordiality of President Heidar Aliev and his pride in telling me of the religious tolerance on which the life of your Country is hinged. When I learned the news of his death, I prayerfully commended his soul to God. I likewise pray for the new President, Ilham Aliev, and for all the People of Azerbaijan, wishing them days of peace and prosperity.

I hope with all my heart that with the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, peace may return to Azerbaijan. Like other disputes, this should be faced with good will in the mutual search for reciprocal openness and understanding, and in a spirit of true reconciliation.

3. Thank you, dear friends for this visit. When you go home, take back to everyone the embrace of the Pope and of the Catholic Church. May God help you to build an ever more fruitful coexistence between you and the Catholic Community of Azerbaijan. To it and to its Pastor, dear Fr Ján Capla, I send my affectionate thoughts, as I pray the Lord to help him carry out his evangelical mission in the Caucasus.

4. May your visit to the Pope of Rome be, as it were, a symbol for the world. In other words, may it show that tolerance is possible and is a value of civilization that prepares the ground for a broader human, civil and social development in greater solidarity.

No one has the right to present or to use religions as instruments of intolerance or the means of aggression, violence and death. On the contrary, if friendship and reciprocal esteem among them is additionally sustained by a commitment to tolerance on the part of Government Leaders, it can be a rich resource of authentic progress and peace.

5. All together, Muslims, Jews and Christians, let us appeal to humanity in the name of God and civilization, so that homicidal violence may cease and people take the way of love and of justice for all. This is the path of the religions. May God help us walk on it with perseverance and patience!