



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO DR. KONJI SEBATI
AMBASSADOR OF SOUTH AFRICA
ACCREDITED TO THE HOLY SEE****

Thursday 1 December 2005

Mrs Ambassador,

I am pleased to welcome you to the Vatican and accept the Letters of Credence by which you are appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of South Africa to the Holy See. I thank you for the greetings which you bring on behalf of His Excellency Mr Thabo Mbeki, President of the Republic, and I gladly reciprocate with good wishes and the assurance of my prayers for him and the people of South Africa.

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1994, the Holy See has followed closely your country's transformation and its successful efforts to bring about an integrated, stable and pluralistic society. While challenges still remain, the reality of a new South Africa has deservedly received acclaim and admiration. The same political good will and administrative maturity that produced the peaceful transition to a full democracy must likewise be brought to bear on other areas of present concern. Many of these questions are also shared by other countries in the region and are the result of globalisation or internal social transformation. Intensive urbanization, for example, has resulted in the lack of proper housing, unemployment, criminality and an exaggerated social stratification. These challenges can only be effectively addressed by promoting both social cohesion and economic growth, while offering, especially to the poor and marginalized, opportunities for education and employment. My prayers are raised to Almighty God that, as your nation continues to address these matters, her political vision will remain open to love of truth, peace and justice.

The high proportion of young people in your population, the traditional African values of deep

respect for human life, family, community and social solidarity will certainly contribute to the process of long-term development. This balanced approach to change has indeed helped to raise the moral prestige of the new South Africa and has made her one of the most influential countries on the continent. I am hopeful that her example will enable her to maintain a strong voice in the international community, especially regarding the elimination or reduction of foreign debt, regional peace-building and the assistance to other nations in the consolidation of proven economic and social programs.

Mr Ambassador, in recent years the social stability and economic success of South Africa have attracted increasing numbers of refugees from countries sadly troubled by poverty, political unrest and violence. Your nation's policy of acceptance of others has been exemplary for the entire region. It is not easy for local and national governments, already strapped by economic and social problems, to accommodate those who are searching for a new and better life. The attention given to them, however, is a characteristic sign of an authentically civil society, moved by a just compassion for the less fortunate. History has clearly demonstrated that "immigration can be a resource for development rather than an obstacle to it" (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 297). I have no doubt that your nation by drawing on the talents and hopes of these newcomers, and treating them always with the dignity and respect they deserve, will reap many benefits.

The great majority of the South African population is Christian and therefore capable of offering the country the important religious values of solidarity, tolerance and reconciliation. For her part, the Catholic Church remains committed to giving her full support to the promotion of modern society by furthering dialogue and mutual understanding (cf. *Ecclesia in Africa*, 79). She is well respected for her efforts to work with civil governments in addressing the many social and human problems affecting Africa. One notable example of this is the struggle against HIV/Aids where statistics taken in several regions of Africa confirm the results of policies based on continence, the promotion of faithfulness in marriage and the importance of family life. Education, health-care and assistance to the poor also indicate sectors where collaboration has been most advantageous and rewarding. In this context, I would assure you that the Catholic Church will continue to offer her cooperation wherever she may be of assistance, and I would encourage your government to promote an ever-greater awareness of the dignity of human life from conception to natural death.

Mr Ambassador, as you begin your duties as your country's Representative to the Holy See I assure you of my prayers for the success of your mission. You may be certain that the various departments of the Roman Curia will be willing to assist you in this task. I ask Almighty God's abundant blessings upon you and upon the beloved people of South Africa.

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