



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. Mr. ISAAC CHIKWEKWERE LAMBA
NEW AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF MALAWI
TO THE HOLY SEE**

*Clementine Hall
Thursday, 18 December 2008*

Your Excellency,

As you present the Letters accrediting you as the Ambassador and Minister Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Malawi to the Holy See, I offer you a cordial welcome. I ask you kindly to convey my greetings to the President, Dr. Bingu wa Mutharika, together with my prayerful good wishes that Almighty God will bless the nation and its people with prosperity and peace.

I thank you for your gracious mention of the Church's contribution to Malawi's spiritual and economic development, especially through her apostolates in the areas of education, charitable assistance and health care. This mission has its source and inspiration in the Church's desire to bear witness to the love of God (cf. *Deus Caritas Est*, 20); as such, it knows no boundaries of race or creed, but seeks to enable each human person to develop fully as an individual and as a member of a society marked by solidarity and genuine concern for the needs of others. The recent foundation of the Catholic University in Blantyre is a sign of the Church's commitment to the intellectual and human formation of those young people who will become the leaders of the next generation, with responsibility for shaping the future of your country and that of the greater continent of which it is a part.

Africa in fact is increasingly aware of the urgent need for unity and cooperation in facing the challenges of the future and ensuring sound and integral development for its people. This demands wise and far-sighted policies, the prudent stewardship of resources, and a resolve to curb corruption and injustice, as well as to promote civic responsibility and fraternal solidarity at

every level of society (cf. *Ecclesia in Africa*, 92). In a special way, political leaders must have a deep sense of their duty to advance the common good, and thus be firmly committed to dialogue and readiness to transcend particular interests in the service of the whole body politic. Like many of its neighbours, Malawi has experienced the difficulties and struggles born of the effort to build a free, modern and democratic society. It is my hope that the important steps currently being taken by your country's religious and social leaders to help open broader avenues of communication and greater cooperation in the nation's political life will bear fruit in a renewed determination to tackle together the critical issues facing Malawi at the present time.

Indeed, the struggle against poverty, the need to ensure food security, and the continuing efforts to combat disease, especially the scourge of AIDS, represent development priorities which cannot be deferred. Authentic development, in addition to its necessary economic aspect, must contribute to the intellectual, cultural and moral advancement of individuals and peoples. The Church is convinced that the Gospel confirms and ennobles whatever is true and good in the traditional wisdom and values of the peoples whom she encounters (cf. *Nostra Aetate*, 2). For this reason, she is concerned to promote models of integral development, while resisting models of progress which run counter to those traditional values. As Malawi seeks to foster a sound economic growth, it is necessary that meeting basic human needs and ensuring a dignified standard of living, especially for the most indigent strata of the population, continue to be essential priorities. Similarly, economically and ethically sound models of development must include a specific commitment to respect the natural environment, which is a treasure entrusted to all humanity to be responsibly cultivated and protected for the good of future generations (cf. *Message for the 2008 World Day of Peace*, 7).

I have noted with appreciation your reference to the religious tolerance which marks your nation's life, and to the importance for society of respectful and harmonious relations between the followers of the various religions. The freedom of religion guaranteed by Malawi's constitution has enabled the Church to proclaim her message without coercion or interference, and to carry out her works of education and charity. It has also allowed the Catholic community to participate freely in civic life, to contribute to the formation of consciences, and to bring out the moral dimension of the various social, political and economic issues affecting national life. In carrying out her activities, the Church in Malawi seeks no privileges for herself, but only the autonomy needed to fulfil her mission in the service of God and man. Since respect for conscience and religious freedom are the cornerstone of the whole structure of human rights (cf. *Address to the Diplomatic Corps Attached to the Holy See*, 7 January 2008), the sure guarantee of those rights must be seen as an essential condition for the building of a truly just, free and fraternal society.

Your Excellency, as you prepare to take up your mission in the service of Malawi and its people, I offer you my prayerful good wishes, while assuring you that the various offices of the Holy See are prepared to assist you in the fulfilment of your high duties. I trust that your mission will serve to consolidate the good relations existing between the Holy See and the Republic of Malawi. Upon

you and your family, and upon all your fellow citizens, I cordially invoke Almighty God's blessings of joy and peace.

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