



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II

TO H. E. Mr SIMON B. ARAP BULLUT

AMBASSADOR OF KENYA TO THE HOLY SEE*Friday, 9 January 1987 Mr Ambassador, It is my pleasure to welcome Your Excellency as the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Kenya to the Holy See. On this auspicious occasion of the presentation of your Letter of Credence I express my gratitude for the cordial greetings sent by your President, His Excellency Daniel Toroitich Arap Moi, and by the Government and people of Kenya. I ask you to assure the President of my continued prayers for the prosperity of your country.

Today's ceremony reminds me vividly of the pastoral visits that I made to your country both in 1980 and more recently in 1985 on the occasion of the Forty-third International Eucharistic Congress. During those visits I was able to experience your warm hospitality and to appreciate the beauty that Kenya manifests in her natural scenery and in the noble qualities which enrich your people and culture. I shall long remember looking upon the smiling and hope filled faces of your children and young people.

I note with satisfaction your reference to the role exercised by the Church in Kenya's development. It is my fervent prayer that the Church, in obedience to Christ's command of love expressed through service to others, may continue to take an active part in the progress of your country, especially in the fields of health care, education and needed social services.

The Church's involvement in the advancement of society is to be understood as an aspect of her religious mission. The Second Vatican Council, in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, explains clearly that "the purpose which Christ set before the Church is a religious one. But out of this religious mission itself come a function, a light, and an energy which can serve to structure and consolidate the human community according to the divine law. As a matter of fact, when circumstances of time and place create the need, she can and indeed should initiate activities on behalf of all men. This is particularly true of activities designed for the needy, such as the works of mercy and similar undertakings" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 42). I appreciate in particular your statement concerning the religious freedom that is guaranteed to the citizens of Kenya through the State Constitution. The basic right to religious freedom, with immunity from any form of external coercion, is clearly defined in the Vatican Council's Declaration on Religious Freedom. This document points out that the foundation of such freedom is the dignity of the individual human

person, and it is out of respect for each individual that freedom of worship is to be recognized by constitutional law. Furthermore, since the exercise of religion consists primarily in those free acts whereby an individual directs his life to God, such acts can neither be imposed nor prohibited. At the same time we must keep in mind that the right to religious freedom is expressed not only individually but in society. Thus its exercise must ensure respect for the rights of others and for the common welfare of all. A nation's well-being can be safeguarded when all its different ethnic and social groups are able to live in mutual respect for each other's fundamental rights while engaging in frank and open dialogue. The Church as far as it is within her competence is always ready to play her own part through respectful and harmonious cooperation with the Government and the other civil and religious authorities of the country. It is with genuine concern that the Holy See observes the problem of refugees, which especially in your own region of the African continent has taken on preoccupying and to times tragic aspects. Your country, and I am pleased to note this fact on this occasion, is sensitive to the plight of the many refugees crossing its frontiers, and has offered them prompt hospitality and generous assistance. Mr Ambassador, the role of the Holy See in work for international peace and human rights is grounded in the conviction that human beings are formed in the image and likeness of God and therefore all have equal dignity. This shared dignity demands that we should live always in harmony, respecting each other and devoting ourselves to work for the common good. International peace will only be achieved when we become thoroughly convinced of the universal brotherhood of the human family and truly seek the good of others and of the whole human community. As you begin your mission, Mr Ambassador, I assure you of the complete cooperation of the Holy See in the fulfilment of your duties. It is my hope that you will further in every way the good relations which already exist between the Holy See and the Republic of Kenya. Upon Your Excellency, and upon the President, Government and people of Kenya I invoke God's blessings of peace and well-being.

*AAS 79 (1987) p. 1168-1170.

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