



The Holy See

***DISCORSO DI GIOVANNI PAOLO II
A S.E. IL SIGNOR HUNAIN HATEM, NUOVO AMBASCIATORE
DELLA REPUBBLICA ARABA DI SIRIA PRESSO LA SANTA SEDE*Sabato, 1° aprile 1989***

Mr. Ambassador,

I am happy to receive Your Excellency on the threshold of your mission of representing at the Holy See the authorities and the entire Syrian people, a people whose history, I am pleased to recall, and as you yourself have mentioned, is several millennia old and rich in cultural and spiritual tradition.

Please do me the layout of conveying to His Excellency the President, Mr. Hafez Al-Assad, who has appointed you to this lofty mission which you begin today, my gratitude for the message he has entrusted to you. In echoing his deferential greeting, I express my best wishes for himself and the Syrian nation which he must guide and serve to a regional context that is particularly troubling at the present time.

1. Your noble nation, situated at the crossroads of three continents, has long been a meeting point of the Babylonian, Egyptian and Greek civilizations. History has not spared it any torments until its independence was won in 1946 opening for the Syrian Arab Republic a more stable period in the enjoyment of its sovereignty.

In the wake of your distinguished predecessors, you have expressed, Mr. Ambassador, your desire to see the friendly relations between Syria and the Apostolic See consolidated. These words, which I appreciate, reinforce my hope to see the successful outcome of the dialogue which the Holy See wishes to foster among all those who can contribute to the peace of the Near East. I congratulate you for desiring to fulfil your task in such a spirit. For my part, I can assure you that my collaborators will receive you as often as you will deem it necessary, and always with good will and interest.

2. The diplomatic relations which the Holy See maintains with numerous nations, diverse in culture and in their role on the international scene, have a special nature, as you know. Their principal inspiration is the promotion of the basic ideals which protect and enhance the human person, assuring respect for his or her dignity, striving against difficulties to promote a civilization of tolerance, mutual help and fraternal love. History, teacher of truth, shows that violent confrontations cannot provide the desired solutions to problems of human groups. They are in fact illusory attempts which bring about ruin and weigh heavily on the heritage of the succeeding generations.

3. The trials which your country has experienced should help it to understand the sufferings which afflict the people of the Near East, the victims of destructive and deadly conflicts for such a long time. Is it really impossible to restore to that part of the world where the diversity of its peoples and religions is indelible because of its historic roots, its original countenance of coexistence, which has been such an example for so many years? Such a wish should not be considered a mere ideal. In the one human family, the nations have the right to preserve, in total freedom and independence, their character, a source of wealth for all, by the diversity of languages, customs, cultures and spiritual traditions. We hope that the spirit of mutual respect and aid will prevail; in the final analysis, it will be for the good of all humanity.

4. In the course of your mission, Mr. Ambassador, your various contacts will give you the opportunity to recognize, doubtlessly better than elsewhere, the aspirations of the different peoples of the earth for a common ethic based on the promotion and defence of human rights. The open and disinterested nature of the relations that are forged here allow one to understand the depth of that aspiration; basically, it is simply a matter of allowing the person to develop in all the beauty of his or her human condition. It involves respecting a wisdom which all the monotheistic religions agree in recognizing as rooted in the will of God the Creator, present in human history. The dignity of the human person, the moral values of justice, freedom, truth, solidarity and peace, particularly precious in the sight of all people of good will are all too often contradicted in the events which our world experiences. Certainly the Holy See shares with the nations which have chosen to establish diplomatic relations with it the intent to face courageously the challenges of the day and to solve them through the exploration of all possibilities to give all nations, large or small, the benefits of a co-existence founded on the essential human values.

At the end of this meeting, I want to express once again to Your Excellency my ardent desire to see peace grow in the Near East, a peace which will allow all peoples to draw nearer to their heritage, to regain their independence, tranquility and prosperity.

Mr. Ambassador, I hope that our mission may be fruitful, in the spirit with which you yourself have described it. I hope that you will have the satisfaction of accomplishing a useful and positive task, and that your contacts with the Apostolic See, as well as with the entire Diplomatic Corps, will give you the enrichment of an experience of a cultural, moral and spiritual nature.

I invoke upon you and your nation the abundant graces of the Almighty and Merciful

Lord.

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