



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. MR HABTEMARIAM SEYOUM TEKIE
NEW AMBASSADOR OF ETHIOPIA TO THE HOLY SEE****

Friday, 10 March 1989

Mr Ambassador,

I offer you a cordial welcome on this occasion of the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Ethiopia to the Holy See. The greetings which you have expressed on behalf of your President His Excellency Mengistu Haile Mariam and of the Government and people of Ethiopia are deeply appreciated. I would ask you to convey my own prayerful good wishes for the peace and wellbeing of all the people of your country.

As Your Excellency has mentioned, cooperation between the Holy See and your Government stems from contacts which the ancient State of Ethiopia has maintained with the Holy See for many centuries. Underlying this relationship is the Holy See's great respect and esteem for the rich cultural and religious traditions of the Ethiopian people and of the Coptic Orthodox Church to which many of your fellow-citizens belong.

Precisely because of these long-standing links, the Holy See has followed with great sorrow the situation of distress suffered by the population in recent times. The whole world has been a witness to the devastating effects of famine, and while the considerable show of solidarity on the part of the international community, and also private groups, is welcomed and appreciated, there remains a sense of frustration that more was not or could not be done to save human lives.

Your Excellency has referred to the priority being given to eliminating disease and to providing opportunities for educational and economic advancement. This calls for a great effort on the part of the whole nation, and it is important to be able to rely on the free and intelligent collaboration of all sectors of the population. Development involves the will of a people to overcome negative

situations. It cannot be implemented without a widespread sense of participation and collaboration. It begins and is most appropriately accomplished in the dedication of each people to its own social progress (Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 44). To say this in no way denies the need for support from the international community, but underlines the fact that it is the developing nations themselves which are primarily responsible for creating conditions of internal peace and respect for the legitimate rights of citizens in the service of the common good, so that genuine development may take place.

The Catholic community in Ethiopia strives as much as it can to be actively involved in the process of development. Through her educational and charitable agencies, the Church defends and promotes human dignity by concerning herself with nutrition and health, general education, family life and moral integrity, always of course against the background of man's relationship with God. In all of this she follows her religious and humanitarian mission. From the State she seeks above all the guarantee and protection of the religious freedom which is every individual's inalienable right. In this respect I would repeat what I wrote in my *Message for the 1988 World Day of Peace*: "The freedom of the individual in seeking the truth and in the corresponding profession of his or her religious convictions must be specifically guaranteed within the juridical structure of society; that is, it must be recognized and confirmed by civil law as a personal and inalienable right in order to be safeguarded from any kind of coercion by individuals, social groups or any human power" (Eiusdem *Nuntius ab diem ad pacem govendam dicatum pro* a. D. 1988, 1, die 8 dec. 1987: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II X*, 3 [1987] 1333s.). Far from being an abstract notion, religious freedom profoundly affects the lives of individuals and societies.

On this occasion I wish to stress the grave concern with which the Holy See is following the almost forgotten situation of armed conflict in some regions, which render humanitarian relief efforts most difficult. I pray that a solution will be worked out on the basis of a true and frank recognition of the rights of those involved, and that an early cessation of hostilities may be brought about through mutual understanding.

It is my fervent hope, Mr Ambassador, that through your mission the good relations existing between the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the Holy See will be further strengthened, and I assure you that in your endeavours you will have the cooperation and assistance of the departments of the Holy See. Upon yourself and the people of Ethiopia I invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty God.

**Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. XII, 1 pp.526-528.

L'Attività della Santa Sede 1989 pp. 158-160.

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