



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

TO H.E. Ms RUTH SEGOMOTSI MOMPATI, NEW AMBASSADOR

OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA TO THE HOLY SEE**Thursday, 12 December 1996 Your*

Excellency, This is indeed a significant moment in the relations between your country and the Holy See, as you present the Credential Letters appointing you first Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of South Africa. I am pleased to accept these Letters and am confident that the exchange of permanent Representatives will strengthen the ties of friendship which already exist between us. I have vivid memories of my visit to your country last year when I presented the results of the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops. I remember with gratitude the warmth with which I was welcomed by President Mandela and by the Government and people. They have a permanent place in my prayers. You have mentioned South Africa's rebirth as a "new nation", one which rejects segregation and discrimination in order to walk the path of unity and brotherhood. The recent history of your country clearly shows that peace is a victory won when the human spirit is determined to reject the ways of division and conflict in order to follow the path of forgiveness and reconciliation. Peace calls for a courage much greater than that required by the blind vindictiveness which would resort to violence. While it is important that the truth about the past should be known and responsibility laid where it is due, it is even more important that the delicate process of building a just and harmonious multiracial society should go forward. As you have noted, many difficulties remain. They are aggravated and compounded by subtle forms of exploitation still afflicting the whole African continent: the crushing burden of debt, unjust trading practices, the constraints imposed by economic restructuring programmes. If justice and peace are to prevail, international solidarity must replace all forms of exploitation. Wealthier nations are called to show "a sense of moral responsibility for the other nations, so that a real international system may be established which will rest on the foundation of the equality of all peoples" (John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 39). As South Africa continues its efforts to plan and implement programmes aimed at further development, it must not lose sight of one of its greatest natural resources: the family. At last year's World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen, a point which came up over and over again in the discussions, and which appears repeatedly in the official concluding report, is the affirmation that the family is the basic unit of society and, as such, is to be protected and strengthened. In fact, the whole of human society is deeply rooted in the family and any weakening of the family cannot but be a potential source of tragedy. In this light, life itself must never be undervalued or neglected. Respect for the life of every human being—not excluding the unborn, the elderly and the infirm—remains the true measure of any society's greatness. The right to life in fact is the foundation of all other human rights, and is the essential factor in upholding and promoting the value and dignity of the human person, in strengthening the social fabric and in ensuring that the priorities of peoples and nations are set in proper order. It is precisely because of her deep respect for life and her keen interest in promoting human rights and dignity that the Church is an active partner in the quest for authentic development. These are the objectives which she

pursues in her service of love, especially in the fields of education, health care and social service. In this regard, I very much appreciate Your Excellency's words concerning the Church's contribution to the building up of South African society, I am certain that, with the new constitutional guarantees of rights and freedom, the Catholic citizens of your nation will continue to bear faithful witness to the Gospel of Christ and work with their fellow South Africans for the common good. Your Excellency, in offering my good wishes at the beginning of your mission, I assure you of the readiness of the offices of the Holy See to assist you in your work. Upon yourself and all the citizens of the Republic of South Africa I cordially invoke abundant divine blessings.

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