



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. Dr SERGIO IVÁN BÚCARO HURTARTE,
AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF GUATEMALA
TO THE HOLY SEE***

Thursday, 5 November 1998

Mr Ambassador,

1. I am very pleased to receive the Letters of Credence appointing you Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Guatemala to the Holy See. As I offer you my cordial welcome on this solemn occasion, I would like once again to express the sincere affection I feel for all the sons and daughters of this noble nation, culturally so rich and lavishly endowed by nature.

I am deeply grateful for the respectful greeting you have conveyed to me from President Alvaro Arzú Irigoyen, as well as for the kind words for this Apostolic See and my person, which also attest to the filial sentiments of the Guatemalan people. Please be kind enough to convey my sincere gratitude to them.

2. I recall with deep feeling the two Pastoral Visits I had the joy of making to your country in March [1983](#) and February [1996](#). I remember the warm welcome with which thousands of Guatemalans wanted to show their yearning for peace and their ardent desire to see the end of the fratricidal war. This is why, recalling the appeal of my Brother Bishops of Guatemala, I said: "True peace is urgently needed. A peace that is God's gift and the fruit of dialogue, of the spirit of reconciliation, of serious commitment to integral development in solidarity with every level of society, and especially with respect for the dignity of each person" (*Arrival Address at La Aurora International Airport*, 5 February 1996, n. 4; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 7 February 1996, p. 2).

After lengthy and laborious negotiations, Providence willed that firm and lasting Peace Accords be signed on 29 December that same year, a courageous act which filled Guatemalans, the international community and particularly this Apostolic See with great joy, hope and gratitude to the Prince of Peace for this valuable gift which I myself went to

implore, especially by my pilgrimage to the Shrine of the "Black Christ", the Lord of Esquipulas.

3. At the end of the 20th century, new prospects of freedom and hope are opening to humanity, unfortunately often disturbed by unstable political situations, fragile social structures and distressing conflicts. Today, before these hopeful horizons in which the "logic of war" is more absurd than ever, the way is paved to interdependence between peoples. It is therefore necessary and urgent to work on building a domestic and international order that promotes peaceful coexistence, co-operation, respect for the fundamental rights of individuals and peoples, by recognizing the centrality of each person and his inviolable dignity. I am delighted to see that in Guatemala there is a glimmer of those new horizons which are inviting people to intensify their efforts to continue building a renewed society of greater solidarity.

Mr Ambassador, you have referred to the role of the Catholic Church, which in a constant and self-sacrificing way, at times misunderstood, has offered her valuable contribution during the long peace process in your country. Many appeals for reconciliation and forgiveness were made by the Guatemalan Bishops. In this regard, the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 offers a unique opportunity to achieve this reconciliation and thus to strengthen the accords made with so much effort. This will be the greatest tribute your country can pay to those who generously spent their lives, even shedding their blood for these noble and lofty objectives.

4. The Church in Guatemala, aware of her grave responsibility at the present time and faithful to her religious, moral and social mission, without relinquishing her legitimate autonomy, is prepared to continue the "healthy collaboration" with the authorities and the various institutions of the State and of Guatemalan society, to promote and support all initiatives directed to the greater good of the individual, of society and especially of the family, the sanctuary of love and life (cf. *Centesimus annus*, n. 39). Far from purely temporal interests, the Church will continue to proclaim the Good News of salvation, ready to make her generous contribution in areas which are so important for the integral development of the person, such as education, health care, the defence and promotion of the fundamental rights and freedoms of all, as well as to continue her tireless charitable activity at the service of the most needy.

Your Excellency also recalled that it is necessary to continue evangelizing in order to build a society of greater justice, brotherhood and solidarity, if we want the Christian conception of life and the Church's moral teaching to be the essential inspiration for the people and groups who work for the nation's good. When I received the Bishops of your country during their ad limina visit in 1994, I referred to the Episcopate's joint document entitled "500 años sembrando el Evangelio": "The new evangelization then must preserve the spiritual treasures of your people and encourage in everyone a conversion which increasingly corresponds to the Gospel" (4 March 1994, n. 2; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 16 March 1994, p. 3). Only in the light of the Gospel can solutions be found to achieve "whatever affects the dignity of individuals and peoples, such as authentic development" (*Sollicitudo rei socialis*, n. 41). A society without fundamental values and ethical principles gradually deteriorates.

5. I am pleased to see your Government's efforts to improve the conditions and quality of life of Guatemalans, as well as the results already achieved. It is a service to human dignity, which requires the support of all social groups, in order to continue laying the foundations of an ever more just society. It is the common desire to see soon in Guatemala a society in which the rights of the individual and of the community are increasingly protected and guaranteed; all children have access to health services and education; the spirit of participation is fostered by overcoming party or class interests; there

is greater access to land ownership for those who lack economic resources; the ethical imperative is an inescapable reference- point for all Guatemalans; wealth is distributed more equitably; in a word, everyone will think of the country's good and fulfil his human and Christian vocation, and the different ethnic groups which make up the rich mosaic of cultures in this nation will learn to live in harmony and mutual respect.

6. The ecclesial community, especially in Guatemala, experienced great sorrow at the detestable assassination of Bishop Juan José Gerardi Conedera, Auxiliary of Guatemala City, who worked so hard for peace in his country and for the recognition and defence of human rights. As I said on that sad occasion, I hope that this tragedy "will clearly show the futility of violence and will spur everyone to commit himself to the search for understanding and dialogue, the only way to ensure the triumph of peace and justice over every obstacle and provocation, and that it will in no way disturb the implementation of the peace accords".

I ardently hope that Guatemala, after experiencing so much suffering, destruction and death which has deeply affected the new generations, will succeed as quickly as possible in moving from this "culture of death" to the "culture of life"; from the "culture of fear", to the "culture of freedom in the truth". The Guatemalan people's desire to know the truth about these and other crimes corresponds to their legitimate yearning never to be oppressed again by insecurity, fear and lawlessness, but to live instead in a renewed society, where the foundations of a solid and lasting peace will be laid on tolerance, justice, freedom and mutual love.

7. Mr Ambassador, before closing this meeting, I would like to express my sincere esteem to you and assure you of the Holy See's support, so that you can successfully carry out the high mission which begins today. At the same time, I ask you once again to convey my best wishes to your Government and your country's other authorities, as I invoke God's blessing upon you and your relatives, upon your staff and upon all the beloved sons and daughters of the noble Guatemalan nation.

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