



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR OF BURUNDI TO THE HOLY SEE*

Thursday, 16 December 1999

Mr Ambassador,

1. I am pleased to greet your Excellency on the occasion of the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Burundi to the Holy See. I was touched by your kind words and I cordially thank you. I would be grateful if you would kindly convey my fervent wishes to President Pierre Buyoya of the Republic of Burundi, and to the Burundian people, whose sufferings and courage in times of distress I know, so that the country will at last rediscover peace and that all its inhabitants will be able to live in safety and brotherhood.

2. Peace, in fact, is a deep aspiration of the Burundian people, as well as of all the inhabitants of the Great Lakes region who have lived for many years in a situation of extreme violence and of frequent violations of their most basic human rights. Once again I would like to address a pressing appeal to all leaders, so that all forms of violence to their peoples will cease. I hope that, thanks to the appointment of a new mediator in the crisis your country is going through, the different parties involved will soon meet at the negotiating table with a sincere desire to end hostilities and come to a definitive solution which will respect the dignity of persons and peoples in law and justice, as well as the love they have for their land.

As you stressed in your speech, if your country is to regain real stability that will enable it to set out resolutely on the paths of development and prosperity, it must also be shown generous international solidarity. Moreover, the conclusion of a global agreement on problems concerning the region of the Great Lakes, with respect for the legitimate rights of each nation, must also make possible lasting peace and encourage fruitful cooperation among all the countries in this part of the African continent.

3. The various religious communities in the country can make an important contribution on the difficult path that leads to restoring peace in Burundi; it is therefore to be hoped that they will be trusted and will have an opportunity to express their viewpoints in the discussions under way, with a view to finding a solution to the crisis. As for the Catholic Church, whose important role at the service of the human person and of all Burundian society you have pointed out, she is prepared to be more and more actively involved in seeking harmony and true reconciliation among all the country's children, as well as in continuing her social action.

4. In the present situation, where so many men, women and children are still victims of blind violence, it is urgent that personal rights and the international conventions be respected by all the belligerents. Summary executions and all acts of homicidal violence are intolerable attacks on the respect due to life, which disfigure man and seriously jeopardize society's future. It should in fact be remembered that "human life is thus given a sacred and inviolable character, which reflects the inviolability of the Creator himself. Precisely for this reason God will severely judge every violation of the commandment *"You shall not kill", the commandment which is at the basis of all life together in society*" (*Evangelium vitae*, n. 53).

Moreover, to create an environment that will encourage the rapid return of normal living conditions for families, it is indispensable that those who have been uprooted from their regular lives, be free to return to their hills and homes in complete safety and that the exiled set out on the way back to their country, to share in building a society that is reconciled and fraternal throughout.

5. Through you, Mr Ambassador, I would like to extend my most cordial greetings to the Catholic community of Burundi. As I recall my recent meeting with the Bishops during their *ad limina* visit, I again encourage it in its fidelity to Christ and to the Church. I hope that the celebration of the Great Jubilee, which will begin in a few days, will be the opportunity for a vigorous spiritual renewal for all the faithful, and that Christ will be their steadfast hope in this time of trial which their country is going through. With all their compatriots, may they be daring and generous peacemakers!

6. Mr Ambassador, at the beginning of your mission to the Apostolic See, I offer you my best wishes for the noble task that awaits you. Be assured that you will find here with my co-workers the attentive and understanding welcome you may require.

I cordially invoke an abundance of divine Blessings upon Your Excellency, upon the nation's leaders and upon all the people of Burundi.

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