



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF CONGO TO THE HOLY SEE*

Thursday, 25 May 2000

Mr Ambassador,

1. I am pleased to welcome Your Excellency for the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of the Congo to the Holy See.

I was touched by your courteous words and I cordially thank you. Through you I would like to greet President Denis Sassou-Nguesso, whom I will have the pleasure to receive in a few days. I extend my cordial wishes to the Congolese people, and I pray that God will inspire them with sentiments of brotherhood and mutual understanding so that they may all live in peace and security, and build a reconciled society marked by solidarity.

2. In your address you told me of the efforts in your country to re-establish a lasting civil peace and to enable all citizens to enjoy their fundamental rights in freedom. I am delighted with the progress made in the search for understanding among all the nation's children, such as the agreement to a cessation of hostilities signed a few months ago, which has led to a noticeable improvement in security. However, to reinforce the state of non-belligerence so that the true and lasting peace which the Congolese people desire may be achieved, it is necessary to encourage a dialogue that excludes no one and to banish once and for all the recourse to arms as a way of solving political conflicts.

The path of harmony among all the Congolese, which your country has taken, is also a path to democracy, which requires the defence of public freedoms and the fundamental rights of the individual and of human communities. Total respect for these rights and freedoms is the surest way to create harmonious relations among the citizens of the same nation beyond internal divisions, and thus to build a State governed by law that guarantees to everyone, particularly the young and the weakest, a stable place in social life and the possibility of living in dignity. In fact, "failure awaits every plan which would separate two indivisible and interdependent rights: the right to peace and the right to an integral development born of solidarity" (*Message for the World Day of Peace 2000*, n. 13).

After so many years of suffering, a true peace can only be achieved if the entire country commits itself with ever greater

courage and determination to the ways of reconciliation and forgiveness. The start of the new millennium is a perfect occasion for working to give justice to the innocent victims of the conflicts, to eliminate the violence that enables some to dominate others and to create a new culture of solidarity.

3. For her part, the Catholic Church, which has also been harshly affected by the violence, is firmly committed to pastoral care that can help people to be reconciled to one another and foster interior healing. I am pleased to know that your country's authorities also wish to give her ever greater assurance of freely exercising her mission. By tirelessly putting herself at the service of peace and brotherhood among men and by seeking to develop a greater awareness of the indispensable universal moral values for dealing with the current situation, the Church fulfils her mission to evangelize, shares her hope in the future and takes part in building society.

Moreover, in the face of the serious threats which mortgage the future of young people, Catholic Church hopes to make an effective contribution to their human, spiritual, moral and civic formation through her educational programmes, particularly her schools. It is essential, in fact, that the new generations be patiently and persistently taught justice, peace and fraternal respect, so that they can acquire a taste for what is just and true, and firmly resist the temptation to resentment and violence.

4. Please allow me, Mr Ambassador, to extend my affectionate greetings through you to the Bishops and the Catholic community of your country. I know the hardships they have borne with all their compatriots, and I thank God for their courage and fidelity to the Gospel. They are witnesses to what Christ accomplishes in the human heart to make everyone messengers of love. In this Jubilee year, I invite them to be artisans of peace and reconciliation with ever greater confidence, showing their brothers and sisters that God has neither forsaken nor forgotten them.

May they remember that the name of each one is written on the palms of Christ, pierced by the nails of the crucifixion (cf. *Ecclesia in Africa*, n. 143)! I hope, at this special moment in the history of the Congolese people, that Catholics will join forces with people of good will to build a prosperous nation in solidarity.

5. As you beginning your mission to the Apostolic See, I offer you my best wishes for its success. Be assured that those who work with me will offer you the attentive and understanding assistance that you may need.

I cordially invoke an abundance of God's blessings on Your Excellency, on the Congolese people and on those responsible for their destiny.

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