



The Holy See

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

Thursday, 15 June 2000

Mr Ambassador,

1. I am pleased to receive the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Guatemala to the Holy See. I am deeply grateful to you for your words which show the good relations between the Apostolic See and this noble Central American nation, "where remarkable cultures have developed and where the people are distinguished for their nobility of spirit and for their countless demonstrations of deep faith and love for God, filial veneration of the Blessed Virgin and fidelity to the Church" (*Arrival Speech, La Aurora International Airport, Guatemala, 5 February 1996, n. 1*).

I am also grateful for the cordial greeting of Mr Alfonso Portillo Cabrera, Constitutional President of the Republic, in which he expresses his personal sentiments and desire to increase the traditional cooperation between the Church and the State for the common good. I ask you, Mr Ambassador, to express my thanks to the President, to whom I extend my best wishes for the important and delicate responsibility he assumed last 14 January.

2. You have come to represent your country on this diplomatic mission to the Apostolic See, which is not unknown to you. Indeed, you already lived here when your father, whom I remember with affection, held the same post that you will be filling and for several years was also Dean of the Diplomatic Corps accredited here. You will therefore be familiar with the nature of this new and important responsibility which your Government has entrusted to you.

By helping to strengthen the good relations between Guatemala and the Holy See, you will also witness the constant efforts it is making in the concert of nations to improve and foster closer

collaboration among all peoples. Its eminently spiritual activity is inspired by the conviction that "faith throws a new light on all things and makes known the full ideal which God has set for man, thus guiding the mind towards solutions that are fully human" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 11). For this reason the Holy See, in addition to devoting attention to the particular Churches of each nation, is also concerned for the good of all citizens and seeks to promote in international forums respect for the rights of individuals and peoples, which honour their dignity and the exalted vocation that God has given every human being.

3. Your presence here, Mr Ambassador, reminds me of the two Apostolic Visits which, out of my pastoral concern for all the Churches, I was able to make to Guatemala, the "country of eternal springtime". I thus had an opportunity to become acquainted with its "great variety of ethnic and linguistic riches ... a wealth that makes it the depository of a rich and varied culture which the Church has been evangelizing for almost five centuries. This is a treasure worth preserving by diligently working for the respect of each person's inalienable rights, which belong to every man and woman since they are made in God's image and likeness" (*Departure Speech*, La Aurora International Airport, Guatemala, 9 February 1996, n. 3).

4. I would like to assure you, Mr Ambassador, that I feel very close to Guatemala, am delighted with its achievements and share its concerns. When I visited it in 1983 and 1996, the internal civil war was still afflicting large parts of the country and claiming many victims. In these circumstances, I made a pressing appeal for dialogue between the parties concerned in order to end a situation that was being indefinitely prolonged. The signing of the Peace Agreements at the end of 1996 opened a new era for all Guatemalans, closing one of the saddest and most tragic periods in its national history and initiating a phase of hope for the people, afflicted by a tragedy which had so seriously damaged all social classes.

In this regard it is a cause of satisfaction that in recent years the nation has been able to enjoy a climate of political peace without great disturbances, even when it had to confront a legacy of serious difficulties in coexistence, among which should be mentioned the still unexplained murder of Bishop Girardi and delicate situations in the economic sphere. The country has shown that it can face its own destiny through normal democratic activity that ensures the participation of all its citizens in the nation's political decisions.

I ardently hope that this civic maturity will be increasingly supported by a correct concept of the human person. A profound awareness of these values will encourage cooperation between the various political forces, despite legitimate differences, in solving the most acute problems affecting the nation's general interests and especially the demands of justice and peace. This requires truly deep and lasting ideals which are anchored to the objective truth about the human being, ideals to which society's leaders must bear witness by their desire for service, openness and honesty, infecting all the people, so to speak, with their commitment to building a better future.

5. In the same way, the peace achieved by the signing of the above-mentioned Agreements, in which many people of good will and national and international institutions had a hand, requires the repair of the social fabric, so seriously damaged by the scars of the past war. In order to reach this goal, the country must continue to be built on solid, stable principles such as respect for the dignity of every human person and for the legitimate rights of communities and various ethnic groups. It is also important, with regard to any attempted violation, always to respect the principles of the separation and independence of the three powers which are the foundation of democracy in a State governed by law.

For a secure and hopeful future, it is essential not to abandon the basic values and institutions of every society, such as the family, the protection of the young and the most neglected, especially if the very foundations of law, the freedom and dignity of individuals, are being undermined by attacks on life from the moment of its conception. The indigenous peoples deserve special attention: they must be given access to an ever better and more decent life in both quality and quantity - in areas such as education, health care, infrastructure and other services - while respecting their own cultures, so worthy of esteem. In this regard it should be pointed out that the Dioceses in which indigenous communities live should organize specific projects designed to strengthen these communities in the Catholic faith embraced by their ancestors and to promote the recognition of their dignity as persons and as a people, while facilitating their full participation in the benefits of progress enjoyed by the rest of the Guatemalan people.

6. In your address you mentioned the Government's intention to begin a literacy campaign, scheduled for next October, in order to overcome this scourge which seriously threatens human dignity by impeding the integral development of many Guatemalan men and women and preventing them from participating in building the new society. In this regard, I am pleased to note that the Episcopal Conference of Guatemala has accepted the formal invitation extended to it and has indicated its willingness to collaborate with other national forces in this noble endeavour by making available its educational institutions, its qualified personnel throughout the country and its centuries-old experience in this area.

7. Mr Ambassador, as you begin to carry out the high office to which you have been appointed, I hope that your task will be fruitful and will help strengthen further the good relations between this Apostolic See and Guatemala, for which you will always be able to rely on the welcome and support of those who work with me. As I ask you to convey my best wishes to the President and to the beloved people of Guatemala, I assure you of my prayers to the Almighty that he will always help you with his gifts, together with your distinguished family, the staff of this diplomatic mission and the authorities and citizens of your country, which I remember with affection and upon which I invoke the Lord's abundant blessings.

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