



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR
OF THE REPUBLIC OF RWANDA TO THE HOLY SEE****

Thursday, 6 December 2001

Your Excellency,

As I accept the Letters accrediting you as the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Rwanda, I offer you a cordial welcome to the Vatican. I ask you kindly to convey to President Kagame and to all your fellow citizens the assurance of my closeness as you continue the challenging work of material and spiritual rebuilding after the immense sufferings caused by the genocidal violence of the past decade. May Almighty God inspire in the hearts of all an ever more firm commitment to the moral values of justice, solidarity, reconciliation and forgiveness, which are the only sure foundation for the nation's rebirth.

I have followed with close interest your country's continuing efforts to restore national unity on the basis of a new Constitution and social programmes aimed at restoring the rule of law, providing assistance to the surviving victims of the genocide and reintegrating the refugees. The commitment of all Rwandans to social, political and moral renewal, demanding as it is, is essential not only to the future of your country but also, on a larger scale, to the pacification of the entire Great Lakes Region. It is my hope that as Rwanda emerges from the nightmare of the recent past it will have the support of the international community in its efforts to re-establish the structures of civil society and promote an integral economic and human development capable of eliminating the deeper causes of injustice and social unrest.

Your Excellency, if the tragic events of the recent past revealed the destructive power of evil and hatred, the present work of national reconstruction presents an important opportunity for the Rwandan people to bear witness to the even greater power of good ever present in the human heart, a good which expresses itself politically in the pursuit of a just and fraternal society based

on unstinting respect for the innate dignity and rights of each human person, regardless of ethnic origin or political views. As the Church's teaching affirms and experience shows, changes in outward structures and programmes are never enough in themselves: true social renewal requires an underlying renewal of hearts and minds which can change hardened attitudes and inspire practical programmes. This is particularly true in the administration of justice, which must safeguard and promote the common good while scrupulously protecting human rights, the rule of law, fairness and equity in the infliction of punishment, especially by avoiding such drastic measures as recourse to the death penalty. In the end, there can be no peace without a firm resolve to respect and protect life as the most sacred and inviolable human reality: "it is not possible to invoke peace and despise life" (*Message for the 2001 World Day of Peace*, 19).

The Catholic Church in your country has placed itself at the service of this great moral awakening and of the programme of national reconciliation and renewal. This year the Church in Rwanda commemorates the centenary of its birth, and has just recently celebrated, in union with the universal Church, the Great Jubilee of the birth of Jesus Christ. Both these events have challenged her to a sober assessment of her past, a "purification of memory", and a recommitment to her divine mission. Through her proclamation of the Gospel and her witness to the moral law, the Church seeks to inculcate reverence for God, the Creator of all, an understanding of the sublime destiny of each man and woman, and an awareness of the God-given unity of the human race, a unity which embraces and is enriched by diversity. I deeply appreciate Your Excellency's expression of gratitude for the Catholic Church's past and present contribution to Rwandan national life through her programmes of education, charitable assistance and health care. In all these areas, the Church strives to express her own nature as a communion of faith which works through love (cf. *Gal 5:6*). By calling for a constant conversion of hearts and a sincere examination of consciences, she seeks to be a prophetic voice in Rwandan society. She is moved only by a desire to contribute to the well-being of the nation, in cooperation with the civil authorities, the members of other religious traditions and all men and women of good will.

In Rwanda, as elsewhere on the African continent, the future is already in the hands of the young. Africa's strong tradition of family life is her most precious resource in preparing the younger generation to take up the challenges of the new century. Rwanda's families need to be encouraged and given practical support and assistance in their task of shaping the minds and hearts of the young and training them to become responsible and generous members of society. The Rwanda of the future greatly needs the immense enthusiasm and reserves of energy which are unleashed when the young are inspired by high ideals and worthy goals, and are provided with the cultural and spiritual resources to attain them. At every level of national life efforts must be made to combat the threats posed to young people by illiteracy, idleness, drug abuse, and the importation of ways of thinking and patterns of behaviour that run counter to the noblest values of the African tradition. Most importantly, the young need to be provided with concrete examples of integrity, honesty and concern for others, and enabled to see that authentic human happiness and fulfilment comes only through the generous gift of self to others. In this way they will be "craftsmen

of a new humanity, where brothers and sisters – members all of the same family – are able at last to live in peace" (*Message for the 2001 World Day of Peace*, 22).

Your Excellency, throughout the long years of your country's sufferings and her patient struggle to rebuild after the destruction, I have remained close to her people in prayer. As you now begin your mission to the Holy See, I wish to assure you once more of my esteem and concern for all Rwandans and to express my confidence that justice and fraternal solidarity will prevail. Invoking upon Your Excellency and your fellow-citizens the divine blessings of wisdom and strength, I ask Almighty God to guide your nation in the ways of development and peace.

**L'Osservatore Romano* 7.12.2001 p.7.

Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, vol. XXIV, 2 p.1045-1048.

L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly edition in English 51/52 p.8

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