



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. MR TÉRENCE NSANZE,
AMBASSADOR OF BURUNDI****

Thursday, 15 May 2003

Mr Ambassador,

Welcome to the Vatican, where I have the pleasure of meeting you, Your Excellency, on the occasion of the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Burundi to the Holy See.

Thank you for your courteous words. Your accreditation to the Holy See occurs at the very moment when your country, implementing the Arusha Declaration, is embarking on a new stage in its journey towards reconciliation and the establishment of peace. I would be grateful if you would convey to those responsible for the nation's future and to all its inhabitants my fervent good wishes for the Authorities and for all Burundians, so that, whatever their social background, they may more and more clearly express their effective commitment to the process under way. May all the inhabitants of the country work courageously to achieve a lasting peace founded on justice and forgiveness, so that they can live in safety in their own land. It is the common patrimony of all Burundians, in which all are called to recognize one another as brothers and sisters!

You have just stressed, Mr Ambassador, that the need to arrive at a definitive and permanent ceasefire is a necessary prerequisite for peace in your country. Hatred and violence have caused too much suffering and are still stirring up too much resentment. The agreements concluded between the Government and the majority of the armed groups witness to the progress that can be achieved when paths of constructive dialogue and consultation are followed. The agreements have also restored the confidence of the international community which has begun to give active support to the process under way. They have also inspired great hope among the Burundian people, scarred by years of conflict. It is important today, therefore, not to disappoint this hope but to reinforce it. To do this, it is the task of political leaders first of all to demonstrate their sincere desire to have the ceasefire agreement respected and to enforce it. This will be impossible without a proper conception of the exercise of authority marked, in particular, by disinterested service to the national community and the common good, by rectitude in the responsibilities entrusted to them, and by concern to protect the

civilian population and ensure that its rights are respected, as well as involving all Burundians in the cause of the nation. These values, which take priority over any political programme, are an ethical requirement which is the best way to guarantee the internal peace of nations and peace between States. They will protect them from ethnic conflicts and from caprice and corruption, as I reminded the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See last 13 January (cf. n. 5).

The consolidation of national unity requires all the members of the nation to take part in the process under way, to set up stable institutions primarily to guarantee social harmony. For this, it is necessary to persevere in dialogue with all the groups present, in order not to enter into a logic of exclusion that exacerbates antagonism and leads to violence. In this perspective, it also seems necessary to implement, in conformity with the Agreements, adequate measures to enable all the inhabitants of the country, whatever their political, ethnic or religious affiliation, to benefit from the necessary means of subsistence, which will lead each one to respect the good of the others and, especially, of the civilian population.

You mention, Mr Ambassador, the heritage of human, cultural and spiritual values which your country possesses. These values are a precious heritage, thanks to which Burundi, learning constructively from the lessons of the past, can work to build a new form of coexistence in an increasingly reconciled society with ever greater solidarity, careful to trace the path of a future of peace and hope for the new generation. The Catholic Church has been present in Burundi since 1898. She continues today to spare no effort to enlighten hearts and consciences about the need to work for peace and reconciliation, and to put all the wealth of her experience at the service of the integral development of individuals and of society as a whole. By her presence in the areas of education, health care, and social and charitable assistance, she hopes to contribute to building Burundian society, while enabling all the country's inhabitants to participate in the human and spiritual progress of all, helping them to be increasingly involved in their own development. She knows from experience that a country's development depends on a better and better formation and on human, moral and spiritual education.

Please allow me, Mr Ambassador, through you, to give a warm greeting to the Catholic community of Burundi and its Bishops. I ask them all never to despair as they face the immense task that awaits them. In this Easter Season, they know that on the Cross of Christ all the works of death were nailed: fear of others, selfishness, violence and hatred. I encourage them to remain watchmen of hope and actors of reconciliation, careful to bring the Gospel of Life wherever the "pillars of peace" are unsteady: truth, justice, love and freedom (cf. *Message for World Day of Peace 2003*, n. 4).

As you are starting your mission to the Apostolic See, I offer you my best wishes for its success. Rest assured that you will find here with my collaborators the attentive and understanding welcome you may need.

Upon you, Your Excellency, upon the persons who surround you, upon the people of Burundi and upon those who preside over their destiny, I cordially invoke an abundance of divine Blessings.

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