



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. MS SIBA NASSES,
NEW AMBASSADOR OF SYRIA TO THE HOLY SEE****

Thursday, 15 May 2003 Madam Ambassador, I am pleased today to welcome you to the Vatican, Your Excellency, on this solemn occasion of the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Syrian Arab Republic to the Holy See. I thank you for the courteous greeting you have conveyed to me from President Bachar Al Assad, and I would be grateful if you would kindly reciprocate my cordial good wishes for him and for the happiness and prosperity of the Syrian people. You mentioned the visit I paid to your country on the occasion of my Jubilee pilgrimage in the footsteps of St Paul. I thank God who enabled me to go to Damascus. It was here that the Christian community welcomed the Apostle Paul for the first time after his conversion, and where the memory of the martyrdom of St John the Baptist is preserved. On that occasion I was able to meet with the leaders of Islam, thus demonstrating the importance of interreligious dialogue to the cause of peace. I did so once again a few months later at the [Day of Prayer in Assisi on 24 January 2002](#), solemnly affirming that in no way can violence in God's name be legitimized and that religions are at the service of the good of humanity and of peace. How is it possible not to recall in your presence the serious situation of tension that marks current international relations? The blind eruption of terrorist violence on 11 September 2001, prompted all leaders to examine carefully the state of the world and reminded them just how fragile is the balance. War, which has once again prevailed, cannot be thought of as a means of resolving conflicts; it seriously harms people and drags the world into deep imbalances. As you know, Madam Ambassador, the Holy See has not ceased to recall that everyone must seek the profound causes of terrorism in order to combat effectively this phenomenon which poses an intolerable threat to the common good of peace and the dignity of persons and peoples. The Holy See has also expressed its steadfast commitment to dialogue among the nations, in the context of the legitimate international authorities, to avoid all unilateral action which risks leading to a weakening of international law and undermines the existing agreement between nations. The search for peace, as we well know, involves honest and deep dialogue between leaders with a view to seeking broader agreements with the participation of international institutions, to avoid any spirit of revenge or temptation to excessive violence that might unleash an even greater evil. This dialogue also demands of the parties involved the ability to question themselves and to oppose effectively situations of injustice or domination that give rise to sentiments of hostility or hatred in peoples, subsequently difficult to uproot. Your country, Madam Ambassador, is directly affected by the conflict that for many years has bathed in blood the Middle East and the Holy Land, the region of the world that is so dear to all believers that has all too often been fought over in the past. How can we disregard the legitimate aspirations of all the peoples living there today to take their own affairs in hand and to live at last with dignity and security, true independence and sovereignty in their own land, to take their proper

place in the concert of nations and contribute their own riches to it? It is to be hoped that all the leaders of this region will have the courage and daring not to be disheartened by previous failures so that they will be capable of an authentic search for peace with respect for justice. I appreciate the attention your Government pays to the work for peace of the Holy See, which you have just echoed. I assure you that it will continue to work without respite to achieve this aim, asking that the international community redouble its efforts for the good of the peoples themselves and assume its responsibility for this war which has lasted too long, more effectively helping the protagonists to rediscover the indispensable path of true dialogue with a view to peace (cf. *Message for World Day of Peace 2003*, n. 7). I have no doubt that your country, which is currently a member of the Security Council of the United Nations, is also working hard to achieve this goal, in accordance with the principles you have just recalled. Your presence here gives me the opportunity to greet the Catholic community of Syria, which I had the joy of meeting during my Jubilee pilgrimage. I know that its members, although few, are anxious to participate in the economic and social development of their country and to take their place in national life, witnessing to the values of responsibility, freedom and dignity of the person which the Gospel ideal inspires in them. May they know that the Successor of Peter is encouraging them all, pastors and faithful, to persevere in their desire for fraternal relations with their Christian brethren of other confessions and in their concern for dialogue with the Muslims! Madam Ambassador, today you are beginning the noble mission of representing your country to the Holy See. Please accept my good wishes for its success, and rest assured that you will find in my collaborators an attentive welcome and cordial understanding! Upon you, Your Excellency, upon those who work with you as well as upon the people of Syria, I cordially invoke an abundance of Blessings from the Most

High.

* *L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English* n. 23 pp.8, 9.

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