



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR OF ZIMBABWE TO THE HOLY SEE

Thursday 15 May 2003

Mr Ambassador,

I offer you a warm welcome to the Vatican as I accept the letters by which you are accredited Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Zimbabwe to the Holy See. I am pleased to receive the greetings and good wishes which you bring from the President, Government and people of your nation, and I ask you kindly to convey to them my own prayerful good wishes. Although many years have passed since my visit to your country, I still have fond memories of the days I happily spent among your fellow Zimbabweans, experiencing their warmth and hospitality, sharing their joys and aspirations. On the occasion of that visit I spoke of Africa as a "continent of hope and promise for the future of mankind" (Speech at Arrival Ceremony in Harare, 10 September 1988, 1): it is my fervent desire that, in this new millennium, that hope and promise will become a reality for the people of Zimbabwe and for all the peoples of Africa.

Your kind tribute to Archbishop Patrick Chakaipa, who passed away only last month, are very much appreciated, and I am grateful also for your recognition of the significant contribution made by the institutions of the Catholic Church to Zimbabwean society at large, particularly in the fields of education, health care and social services. Indeed, the Church sees her apostolate in these areas as an essential element of her religious mission, and she is ever eager to carry out this work in harmony with others who are active in the same fields. Cooperation between Church and State is of great importance in advancing the intellectual and moral training of citizens, who will then be better equipped to build a truly just and stable society. This is part of the contribution that the Church seeks to make to the human development of individuals and peoples, especially those who are most in need.

It is this same commitment that motivates the Holy See in its diplomatic activity. In working with

other members of the international community, the Holy See strives to foster peace and harmony among peoples, looking always to the common good and the integral development of individuals and nations. The task of diplomacy nowadays is increasingly determined by the challenges of globalization and the new threats to world peace which this entails. The key questions no longer concern territorial sovereignty — borders and jurisdiction over certain land areas — even if in some parts of the world this remains a problem. By and large, the threats to stability and peace in the world today are extreme poverty, social inequalities, political corruption and abuse of authority, ethnic tensions, the absence of democracy, the failure to respect human rights. These are some of the situations which diplomacy is called to address.

There is no country in the world which does not face one or more of these problems. For this reason, the values of democracy, good government, human rights, dialogue and peace must be close to the heart of leaders and peoples. The more these values form a fundamental part of a nation's ethos, the greater will be that nation's capacity to build a future worthy of the human dignity of its citizens. Moreover, the globalization of these values represents the globalization of solidarity, which aims to ensure that economic and social benefits are enjoyed by all on a planetary scale. This is a sure way of working for peace in today's world. Conversely, when these values are neglected or, worse, actively violated, no programme of economic or social reform will enjoy long-term success. Instead, social and political violence will eventually increase, the gap between rich and poor will grow ever wider, and government leadership itself will be unable to create an environment that fosters truth, justice, love and freedom.

Utmost vigilance is therefore called for in safeguarding the rights and protecting the welfare of all citizens. Public authorities must refrain from exercising partiality, preferential treatment or selective justice in favour of certain individuals or groups; this ultimately undermines the credibility of those charged with governing. In his famous Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris*, my predecessor Blessed Pope John XXIII, quoting Pope Leo XIII, summed up the situation thus: "The civil power must not serve the advantage of any one individual or of some few persons, inasmuch as it was established for the common good of all" (par. 56). In fact, when everyone is treated on an equal basis — a *sine qua non* for a society firmly based on the rule of law — the value, gifts and talents of each member are more easily recognized and can be more effectively tapped for building up the community. As traditional wisdom handed down in an African proverb has put it: *Gunwe rimwe haritswanyi inda* (many hands make work lighter).

Making reference to your Government's land reform programme, Your Excellency has remarked that this is a vehicle for improving the people's standard of living, achieving equity and establishing social justice. In many countries, such agrarian reform is necessary, as noted in the document "Towards a Better Distribution of Land" published in 1997 by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, but it is also a complex and delicate process. In fact, as this same document points out, it is an error to think that any real benefit or success will come simply by expropriating large landholdings, dividing them into smaller production units and distributing them to others (cf. No.

45). There are first of all matters of justice to be considered, with due weight being given to the various claims of land ownership, the right to land use and the common good. Moreover, if land redistribution is to offer a practical and sustainable response to serious economic and social problems in a given country, the process must continue to develop over time and must ensure that the necessary infrastructures are in place. Finally, and no less important, "indispensable for the success of an agrarian reform is that it should be in full accord with national policies and those of international bodies" (*ibid.*).

Feelings of disenfranchisement or of being unjustly treated only serve to foment tension and discord. Justice must be made available to all if the injuries of the past are to be left behind and a brighter future built. Insofar as the authentic common good prevails, the fundamental causes of civil strife will disappear. The Catholic Church pledges her full support for all efforts to construct a culture of dialogue rather than confrontation, of reconciliation rather than conflict. This in fact is an integral part of her mission to advance the authentic good of all peoples and of the whole person.

Mr Ambassador, as you enter the family of diplomats accredited to the Holy See, I assure you of the ready assistance of the various offices and agencies of the Roman Curia. I am confident that your mission will strengthen the bonds of understanding and friendship between us. Upon yourself and the beloved people of Zimbabwe I cordially invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty God.

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