



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. MR IFTEKHAR AHMED CHOWDHURY
AMBASSADOR OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH
TO THE HOLY SEE***

24 April 1997

Mr Ambassador,

I am pleased to welcome you to the Vatican and to accept the Letters of Credence appointing you Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the People's Republic of Bangladesh to the Holy See. I thank you for the greetings which you bring from the President, His Excellency Mr Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed, and from the Prime Minister, Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina. I ask you kindly to assure them of my prayers for the peace and well-being of your nation and its people.

You have referred to the Holy See's commitment to the service of the human family. Indeed, in its diplomatic activity the Holy See seeks that "wholesome mutual cooperation" (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, 76) between the Church and the political community which redounds to the benefit of individuals, nations and the world at large. At the centre of this cooperation there must be shared concern for people's integral well-being and for the defence of human dignity. The possibility of close cooperation between the Church and the State is ultimately based on our recognition of the fact that the purpose of all social and economic development is the service of man in his totality, taking into account not only his physical needs but also the requirements of his intellectual, moral and religious life.

Man is both a material and a spiritual being. Accordingly, the full human dimension of the person involves both material and spiritual values, and it is the spiritual values which enjoy pre-eminence. For it is the latter which give fullness of meaning to material realities and indicate the proper use that should be made of them. Respect for this hierarchy of values is paramount in ensuring that

social, economic and technological development truly serves the well-being of every person and of the whole person (cf. *Address to the Diplomatic Corps*, 13 January 1997, No. 4). The Church is fully confident that in defending and fostering spiritual values she is making an essential contribution to the realization of humanity's deepest aspirations to peace, genuine solidarity and progress in every field of human activity.

Your people are the heirs to an ancient civilization with a rich diversity of cultural traditions, from which a common national identity has been forged. My fervent prayer is that by further strengthening the harmony that already exists between the various sections of society, Bangladesh will be ever more a nation in which its citizens will be able to contribute effectively to the country's development and will increasingly share in the benefits of economic and social progress.

As I have often had occasion to remark, chief among the conditions required for a peaceful society is the development of a culture based on respect for others, including respect for their right to religious freedom, a freedom which applies to all individuals and communities. Religious minorities especially must be guaranteed the freedom to believe and worship as communities according to their own traditions, and to provide appropriate religious education and training for their own members. Any attempt to impede the exercise of freedom of religion and freedom of conscience inevitably has serious negative consequences for social order and peace in society. Without compromising their religious beliefs, all citizens should be able to feel that they are equal members of their national community and that their contribution to its progress is accepted and appreciated. In this way civil society can count on believers who, because of their deep convictions, will not be dominated by prevailing ideological trends nor hesitate to act in accordance with their aspirations to all that is true and right, an essential condition for securing peace (cf. *World Day of Peace Message*, 1 January 1988, No. 3).

Here I would like to express my gratitude for Your Excellency's remarks on the presence and involvement of Catholics in Bangladeshi society. Although they are one of the smallest minorities, Catholics in Bangladesh are working with their fellow-citizens for their country's economic, social and cultural development. It is also through their dedication that the Church is able to pursue her activity in the fields of education and social assistance. She seeks no special privileges as she offers these services, but merely the freedom to pursue her spiritual mission and to serve the integral good of society. I am confident that the Government of Bangladesh will continue to maintain fruitful contacts with the country's Catholic Bishops regarding matters of mutual interest and collaboration.

Mr Ambassador, I am certain that as your country's diplomatic representative you will do much to strengthen the bonds of friendship between your Government and the Holy See. I offer you my best wishes for the success of your mission and I assure you that the various offices of the Roman Curia will be ready to assist you in fulfilling your duties. Upon Your Excellency and all the people of Bangladesh I cordially invoke the abundant blessings of the Most High God.

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