



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. Mr Omar A. Sultanov,
AMBASSADOR OF THE Kyrgyz Republic TO THE HOLY SEE****

Saturday, 11 January 1997

Mr Ambassador,

It is my pleasure to welcome you today to the Vatican and to accept the Letters of Credence by which you are appointed the first Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan to the Holy See. I ask you to convey my cordial greetings to President Askar Akayev, and to assure him and your fellow citizens of my good wishes for the prosperity and wellbeing of your country. In a special way I pray that the bonds of friendship and esteem which are now being forged between us will grow ever closer and serve the cause of peace, justice and solidarity. Today marks another step forward in your nation's journey of freedom. I wholeheartedly congratulate you and your compatriots on the progress being made in the strengthening of democratic structures and constitutional order, and on your increasing participation in the community of nations.

The ethnic and cultural diversity of your nation is reflected in the languages, races and religions of your citizens, destined to live and work together for the common good. Diversity need never be an obstacle to a nation's unity; rather it enriches a people's patrimony by teaching respect for each person's and each group's attempt to address the fundamental questions of human existence. The differences which distinguish individuals and peoples do not erase their profound unity, since "every culture is an effort to ponder the mystery of the world and in particular of the human person: it is a way of giving expression to the transcendent dimension of human life" (*Address to the United Nations General Assembly*, 5 October 1995, n. 9). We must all be convinced that "the development of a culture based on respect for others is essential to the building of a peaceful society" (*Message for the 1989 World Day of Peace*, n. 9).

As your people continue to improve their economic and social conditions, conscientious efforts are needed in order to ensure that new forms of alienation — ethical relativism and spiritual impoverishment — do not come to weaken the fabric of social life (cf. *Centesimus annus*, n. 19). Societies which have only recently adopted a market economy may be

tempted to identify freedom with the self-interest of certain sectors at the expense of the common good. The advantages of technological progress and the possibilities offered by intellectual and cultural exchanges should not lead to a fresh affirmation of a materialistic mentality which accepts the primacy of things over persons. Nothing of lasting value is gained when the weaker elements of society are neglected, or when the pursuit of profit and unbridled competition hinder solidarity and co-operation. Wise leaders respect the universal moral norms written by God on the human heart and act according to them, convinced that they are the most reliable guide to the authentic renewal of social and political life.

As Your Excellency has remarked, religious belief and practice also make a decisive contribution to national life. Society is strengthened by the presence of believers who, endeavouring to act in accordance with their convictions, seek to promote all that is true and right. It is possible to construct a renewed society and to address the complex and weighty problems affecting it only if the truth about God and about man's transcendent dignity is acknowledged (cf. *Veritatis splendor*, n. 99). When men and women inspired by their religious traditions work together in the care of human life and in fostering social justice, they confirm by their actions that the ultimate foundations of every society worthy of man are ethical and religious. The religious convictions of your people are indeed a force which strengthens their sense of responsibility to the country's welfare and motivates their mutual solidarity.

As the Government and people of Kyrgyzstan press on with necessary reforms, the Catholic Church will offer whatever assistance and support she can in the authentic moral development of society. This she will do by her witness of faith, her teaching and experience, and by humanitarian activity in accordance with her religious mission. The Catholic Church never imposes on a nation or people particular views of society and its structures, but offers the testimony of a lofty concept of man and of his transcendent destiny.

Mr Ambassador, your presence confirms that a new era has indeed begun for the Republic of Kyrgyzstan. I am confident that, as a result of the mission you are assuming today, the bonds of friendship and co-operation between your nation and the Holy See will grow and be consolidated. I assure you that the various offices of the Roman Curia will always be ready to assist you in the fulfilment of your duties. Renewing my good wishes for the success of your mission, I invoke the blessings of the Most High God upon Your Excellency and upon the Government and beloved people of Kyrgyzstan.

**Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, vol. XX, 1 p. 78-80.*

L'Osservatore Romano 12.1.1997 p.8.

L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English n.4 p.7.

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