



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. Mr S. M. Inamullah,
AMBASSADOR OF PAKISTAN TO THE HOLY SEE***

Saturday, 11 January 1997

Mr Ambassador,

I gladly welcome you to the Vatican and accept the Letters of Credence by which you are appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to the Holy See. I thank you for the greetings which you bring from President Farooq Ahmad Khan Leghari and the Prime Minister, and I ask you to convey to them the assurance of my prayers for your nation and its people.

Your Excellency has graciously acknowledged the Holy See's efforts within the international community to foster the establishment of peace and justice in human affairs and in international relations. This service is inspired by an abiding concern for the well-being of all peoples everywhere. The one human family, in all its vast diversity, shares a common destiny on this planet and a common responsibility in developing the world's resources for the benefit of all. Unfortunately the world and its component societies are often marked by a notable lack of equity and justice in the sharing of the benefits of economic, social and cultural progress. At the same time, as so many international meetings on these topics show, there is a growing awareness that the inherent dignity of every human being, no matter what the circumstances of life, constitutes a moral impulse of great intensity in stimulating a development that will fully take account of the inalienable rights through which human dignity is expressed (cf. *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, n. 26). The Holy See seeks to promote this view of integral human development, not least in relation to the safeguarding of religious freedom, a freedom which is an essential expression of the unique dignity of the human person. I am pleased that Your Excellency referred to the rights of minorities, which necessarily include the right to freedom of religion.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted and proclaimed by the United Nations Organization almost 50 years ago, makes clear reference to "the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion" (article 18). It is this freedom which is the basis of all others, since it enables people to fulfil the moral obligation to search for and adhere to the truth,

especially religious truth. That obligation stems from the very nature of the human person, endowed by the Creator with intelligence and free will. Consequently, we must hope that all States will juridically guarantee the freedom of every individual and group to profess their religious convictions.

The civil recognition of the right to religious freedom can be said to be the measure of a society's respect for other fundamental rights. In cases where the State grants a special juridical position to a particular religion, it is especially important to ensure that everyone's right to freedom of conscience is legally recognized and effectively respected. Any law regarding religious matters which is susceptible to abuse and misinterpretation in a manner contrary to the mind of the legislator needs to be clarified in such a way that justice will always be upheld, especially in relation to the weaker sectors of society. Whenever problems of discrimination affecting minorities arise, a dialogue based on mutual respect and concern for the common good constitutes the first and fundamental duty of all parties.

In this spirit, the Catholics of Pakistan are committed to working with their fellow citizens for their country's political, social and cultural development. The Catholic Church has made an important contribution in the field of education at all levels of Pakistani society and is also present in the areas of health care and social assistance. In offering these services, the Church seeks no special privileges but merely wishes to exercise her rights freely and to have these rights duly respected. In this way she seeks to pursue her spiritual and humanitarian mission for the good of society as a whole.

Mr Ambassador, I am certain that we share a great concern for the stability and peace of your entire region. I express the hope that in the international forum Pakistan will use its influence to support initiatives to bring the parties in conflict in surrounding areas to the negotiating table, so that a just and lasting settlement will ensure that the rights and well-being of people who for so long have undergone enormous sufferings will be acknowledged and respected. I

offer cordial good wishes as you begin your term of service as your country's representative to the Holy See, and I assure you of the readiness of the offices of the Roman Curia to assist you in your mission. Upon yourself and the people of Pakistan I invoke the abundant blessings of almighty God.

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