



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR
OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE GAMBIA
TO THE HOLY SEE***

Friday, 18 May 2001

Mr Ambassador,

As you present the Letters of Credence by which you are appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of The Gambia to the Holy See I offer you warm greetings and welcome you to the Vatican. With gratitude for the good wishes which you bring from His Excellency President Yahya Jammeh, I ask you to convey to him my own cordial greetings and the assurance of my prayers for the peace and well-being of the nation.

Although nine years have passed since my Pastoral Visit to The Gambia, the memories of the time I spent among your people remain vividly etched in my mind. My travels to the various countries of the world are made principally as Bishop of Rome and Successor of Saint Peter in the service of the universal Church. At the same time, however, they enable me to show the solidarity of the Church with the world's peoples as they strive for peace, human development and a correct response to the moral and ethical questions facing them today.

It is in this context that I am pleased to note Your Excellency's remarks identifying education and religious values as key factors in creating a culture of morality and a sense of personal and collective responsibility for the future. The Catholic Church will always be a staunch and tireless defender of universal, unchanging moral norms, a role she exercises for no other purpose than to serve man's true freedom. Since "there can be no freedom apart from or in opposition to the truth, the categorical — unyielding and uncompromising — defence of the absolutely essential demands of man's personal dignity must be considered the way and the condition for the very existence of freedom" (*Veritatis Splendor*, 96). Moreover, this service on the part of the Church is directed not

only to individuals but to all mankind: it is for every person and for the political community and human society as such. "These norms in fact represent the unshakable foundation and solid guarantee of a just and peaceful human coexistence, and hence of genuine democracy, which can come into being and develop only on the basis of the equality of all its members, who possess common rights and duties" (*ibid.*).

There exist, then, fundamental moral rules of social life entailing specific demands with which both public authorities and private citizens must comply, and which the international community too is required to respect. This underlying morality must guide all aspects of social and political life. It is in fact a sad commentary that at the dawn of this new millennium serious forms of social and economic injustice, and of political domination, are still affecting entire peoples and nations in different parts of the world, on your own continent of Africa and elsewhere. There is growing indignation on the part of countless men and women whose fundamental rights continue to be trampled upon and held in contempt. For this reason, there is an ever clearer sense of the acute need for radical personal and social renewal in the areas of justice, honesty, openness and solidarity.

The road ahead, however, remains long and difficult. Bringing about the necessary changes will require great effort, especially on account of the number and gravity of the causes which give rise to and aggravate the many situations of injustice present in our world. But by recognizing and abiding by timeless, objective truths — those universal norms in obedience to which man attains full freedom and achieves his full identity — we will find the basis for secure and just relations between people. The Holy See will always speak out in the international forum, loudly and clearly, to defend and promote the transcendent dignity of the human person. It is by virtue of this dignity that all people — the healthy and the infirm, the young and the old, the strong and the weak, the wealthy and the poor, the born and the unborn — are the subjects of rights which no one may violate: no individual, group, class, nation, State or international body.

The Gambia is a country with a proud tradition of peaceful coexistence among its people, a country in which the ideals of tolerance, justice and freedom are held in high regard. Gambian Catholics, although a minority, see themselves as true sons and daughters of their land, an integral part of the nation. The Catholic community will continue to do all it can to support a development that benefits everyone, especially through the Church's activity in the fields of education, health care and social services. Promoting policies of justice, solidarity and service of the common good is the path along which Gambian society can move with confidence towards an ever more widespread prosperity and stable peace. I thank you for your recognition of the contribution which the Catholic Church has made and continues to make to your nation.

Mr Ambassador, as you begin your mission I assure you of any assistance which you may need in the fulfilment of your duties. I am confident that your work will serve to strengthen the good relations which already exist between the Holy See and the Republic of The Gambia. Upon Your

Excellency and all the people of your country I invoke the abundant blessing of Almighty God.

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