



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR OF KAZAKHSTAN TO THE HOLY SEE*

Monday, 17 September 2001

Mr Ambassador,

1. I welcome Your Excellency with pleasure on the occasion of the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as the first Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the Holy See, and I thank you for your kind words. I would be grateful if you would kindly convey my thanks to H.E. Mr Nazarbaiev, President of the Republic, for the cordial greetings he addressed to me.

2. I am delighted that in a few days I shall be visiting your country and will thus be establishing a more direct contact with the authorities and inhabitants in their rich diversity. As you emphasized, different races coexist in the territory of Kazakhstan, with different cultures, languages and religions. This pluralist society is both a challenge and an opportunity. It is a challenge, as I said in my *Message for World Day of Peace*, 1 January 2001, since "in the past, cultural differences have often been a source of misunderstanding between peoples and the cause of conflicts and wars" (n. 8). It is therefore fitting that each specific group be obliged to show attentive respect for the others, while doing its best to know each other better, to overcome possible tensions.

To form together a national community which is enriched by individual differences is also an opportunity. It presupposes learning to live side by side, which "never implies a dull uniformity or enforced homogenization or assimilation; rather it expresses the convergence of a multiform variety and is therefore a sign of richness and a promise of growth" (*ibid.*, n. 10). May your country, which is celebrating 10 years of independence, continue its peaceful progress towards this goal, with ever greater concern for dialogue among its cultures, for the development of collaboration with the neighbouring countries and for integration into the international community!

3. Your country's cultural diversity is accompanied by a wide range of different religions and denominations and, Mr Ambassador, you stressed the importance your Government attaches to this religious pluralism and to dialogue between the different religions, as well as to the spiritual dimension of human life which they express. In this regard, I am pleased with the good relations that exist between the Holy See and your country and with the agreements that guarantee the rights and duties of the Catholic community resident in Kazakhstan, as well as the State's obligations to it.

Indeed, in a state built on a regard for rights, religious freedom is a precious good, an expression of the fundamental dignity of the human person who freely chooses, according to his conscience, the religion to which he belongs. There is no doubt that this freedom invites people and religious communities to contribute together to the common good, with respect for one another and within the framework of the country's laws. I hope that in this rich diversity Kazakhstan will find a solid basis for its human and spiritual development.

4. Through you, I am happy to greet the Catholic community, its pastors and its faithful, whom I will shortly have many opportunities to meet. I urge them to create living and fraternal communities, that witness to the riches of the Gospel and are concerned to be in dialogue with all their brothers and sisters. I know that they are already taking an active part with all their fellow citizens in the life of the nation and in its material and spiritual development. Through you, I would like to address all those, both civil and religious authorities, who have been generously at work in preparing my journey. May they be warmly thanked!

5. Mr Ambassador, today you are beginning the noble mission of representing your country to the Holy See. Please accept my very best wishes for its success, and be assured that you will always find among those who work with me the necessary understanding and support! I very willingly invoke an abundance of divine blessings upon you, upon your family, upon all who work with you and upon on all your compatriots.

**L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly edition in English n.23 p.5.*

