



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC
OF BENIN TO THE HOLY SEE***

Friday, 17 May 2002

Mr Ambassador,

1. With joy, I welcome you on the occasion of the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Benin to the Holy See.

I thank you for your courteous words and for the good wishes you have conveyed to me from Mr Mathieu Kérékou, President of the Republic of Benin. I would be grateful in return if you would kindly express to him my cordial good wishes for him and for the accomplishment of his office at the service of the people of Benin. I also pray the Almighty to obtain that all your fellow citizens may lead a peaceful and dignified life in unity and concord.

2. Mr Ambassador, you emphasized the quality of the relations of collaboration that unite your country with the Holy See. The establishment and opening of the Apostolic Nunciature in Cotonou is a tangible sign which will help solidify these ties of cooperation and give them a new impetus. I am pleased with the efforts your country and its inhabitants have been making for more than 20 years; they open the way to the active participation in the public life of all; the pluralism and diversity of your country's political, cultural and religious members are a great contribution to the nation's dynamism. Conscious of the need to work together responsibly for the common good, may everyone strive to build a society that is ever more based on justice, equity and peace, inviting those responsible for the *res publica* to work to ensure that everyone has the means to meet his needs.

3. The consolidation of a state of rights and democracy guarantees the observance of the fundamental freedoms of all citizens. In every society, it is an indispensable basis for all to share in

the overall development and lasting prosperity. The context of globalization makes more evident the need to work for the common good, fostering the political stability of countries and the economic expansion of a region or continent. In this spirit, when West Africa has even today numerous hotbeds of tension and it is tirelessly warring against the poverty that feeds this violence, your country is called to play an active part in maintaining the geo-political balance of the region. The exemplarity and probity of its institutions, and a constructive dialogue with all the leading agents of civil society, the leaders of the neighbouring countries and those of the international community, render a nation truly able to carry out its mission effectively.

4. The different religious traditions in your country are called to work together, with all the people of Benin, to promote the common good and to establish an atmosphere of peace that consists of reciprocal confidence and esteem. During the *World Day of Prayer for Peace* in Assisi last 24 January, I had the opportunity to recall that it is indispensable for religious people and communities to commit themselves to building peace, and "in the clearest and most radical way to repudiate violence, all violence, starting with the violence that seeks to clothe itself in religion, appealing even to the most holy name of God in order to offend man" (*Address to the Representatives of the World Religions*, n. 4). For her part, the Catholic Church is willing to make a loyal and generous contribution to carrying out this noble plan. By her commitment in the sectors of health care, education or social promotion and in fidelity to her mission of service, she desires to support men and women in their integral development, and to spread the Good News of the Gospel that proclaims peace, love and freedom for all. She pays special attention to the poorest and to children, who are sometimes the innocent victims of an unacceptable trafficking. Likewise, she is concerned to pursue and intensify dialogue with the other religious communities that exist in the national territory, to unite the forces of all people of good will, for the growth of the country and greater social peace. The Catholic communities want to take part daily in the common effort to contribute to the material and spiritual advancement of all, to banish the causes of division and to build a society that is more and more united in solidarity, focusing on awakening consciences and hearts to mutual respect and the responsibility of all in the search for the common good.

5. Through you, Mr Ambassador, I would like to offer to the members of the Catholic community of Benin a cordial greeting. I am thinking of a noble son of your nation, Cardinal Bernardin Gantin, who recently celebrated his 84th birthday. After carrying out his ministry as bishop at the service of the Archdiocese of Cotonou, he remains an important voice of Africa with the Successor of Peter, working tirelessly for his brethren and serving Christ and his Church without counting the cost.

6. At the time when you are beginning your mission to the Holy See, I offer you my best wishes. Be assured that you will always find here in my collaborators a generous welcome and cordial understanding.

7. Your Excellency, I cordially invoke an abundance of divine Blessings upon you, upon the people of Benin and upon their leaders.

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