



The Holy See

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

Thursday, 10 October 2002

Mr Ambassador,

1. I am delighted to welcome Your Excellency on the occasion of the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Gabon to the Holy See.

I thank you, Excellency, for your courteous words and for the greetings you have conveyed to me from President El Hadj Omar Bongo of the Gabonese Republic. For my part, I would appreciate your expressing my best wishes to him for happiness and prosperity for himself and for the whole Gabonese people, as I ask the Most High to grant that all may dwell in peace and cordial understanding.

2. You have just informed me, Mr Ambassador, of the desire of the leaders of your country to persevere in their efforts to set up political, economic and social structures that will make it possible to build a more fraternal and peaceful society. I am delighted with the measures your Government has taken to be ever more at the service of all the country's inhabitants, and with its desire to play an active role in maintaining harmony among the different nations that make up Africa. While the continent continues to suffer acutely from the various conflicts that wound it mortally, I launch a new and insistent appeal that all Africans may be mobilized to work hand in hand, as brothers and sisters, to make their lands livable places where each person may have his share of the national resources. It is important that those in charge of the destinies of African nations persevere in creating conditions for an integral development, marked by solidarity that will actively serve the cause of peace. In this perspective, every member of the national community should take part in civil life so that the state of law and democratic institutions may be consolidated

that should foster concern for the service, the honest administration of the common good, respect for ethnic people and communities and the defense of the poorest persons and of families. All this contributes greatly to the political stability of a country and continent.

Many African countries continue to suffer situations of endemic poverty that disfigure people and make them incapable of providing for their needs and the needs of those for whom they are responsible, and jeopardizing in the long run the future of the national communities. I therefore invite the legitimate authorities of the country to pursue the fight against all forms of poverty, that ruin the hopes of individuals and peoples and breed violence and extremism of every kind. In this spirit, I also want to appeal for new vitality in international cooperation, which must be rethought in terms of a culture of solidarity to fight against the negative effects linked to globalization. As *"an ethic of solidarity ... international cooperation ... cannot be conceived exclusively in terms of help and assistance ... but also and above all, we must recommit ourselves to that solidarity which enables others to live out, in the actual circumstances of their economic and political lives, the creativity which is a distinguishing mark of the human person and the true source of the wealth of nations in today's world"* (*John Paul II's Address to the United Nations*, New York, 5 October 1995, n. 13; *ORE*, 11 October 1995, pp. 9-10). To promote this ethic of solidarity and human advancement more effectively, I keenly hope that the international community, especially by rethinking the debt of the African countries, will pursue its efforts to support local initiatives that involve the population, by guiding the realization of projects by qualified persons who will help train the primary agents and can verify that the goals have really been achieved.

3. Over the years, the dialogue between the Holy See and the State of Gabon has been intensified. I am very glad to note that cooperation has already borne fruit, especially with the signing and ratification of the "Accord-Framework between the Holy See and the Gabonese Republic on the principles and on certain juridical measures concerning their relations and collaboration", that aims at putting the Church and her activities in your country on a legal footing. I welcome the work undertaken that enables the ecclesial community to be more involved in the life of the entire Gabonese people. She hopes to be involved entirely in the ongoing construction of a prosperous and fraternal nation, based on human and spiritual values, with respect for the Church's specific forms and perspective.

I would also like to stress the importance of the Accord recently signed between the Holy See and the Gabonese Republic on the Status of Catholic Education (*ORE*, 29 August 2001, p. 2). In offering an integral education for the new generations, the Church specifically wants to make an effective contribution to the human, spiritual, moral and civic formation of the young people who will be the leaders and decision-makers of the country in the future, by encouraging the complete fulfilment of individuals and the harmonious development of society, opening the hearts of young people to their brothers and sisters who surround them.

4. Mr Ambassador, please permit me, through you, to address my cordial greetings to the Bishops,

the priests, the men and women religious, and the entire Catholic community of Gabon. I invite them in the name of the hope they have received from Christ to become peacemakers ever more dedicated to urban life and to work in a spirit of dialogue and brotherhood, to build a society that is more fraternal. May they remember that they must bear witness to the human and Gospel values and set an example for all in their personal and social life! Thus they will give glory to Christ, the Saviour of the human person.

5. At the end of our meeting, at the moment when you are beginning your mission, I offer you my very best wishes for the noble task that awaits you. I assure you that you will always find an attentive welcome and cordial understanding with my collaborators.

I cordially invoke upon Your Excellency, upon those who work with you, upon your family, upon the Gabonese people and their leaders an abundance of divine blessings.

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