



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR OF THE ISLAMIC
REPUBLIC OF PAKISTAN TO THE HOLY SEE***

Thursday 15 May 2003

Your Excellency,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the Vatican as you present the Letters of Credence by which you are appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to the Holy See. I appreciate the cordial greetings which you have expressed on behalf of the President, the Government and people of Pakistan. It is my great hope that the friendship which already exists between your country and the Holy See will deepen and be marked by further signs of mutual trust and respect. Please convey to President Musharraf and the citizens of your nation the assurance of my prayers for the country's peace and well-being.

I am grateful for your observations made in recognition of the untiring efforts of the Church to promote peace and the alleviation of conflict in our troubled world. The Holy See certainly shares Pakistan's desire to build solid foundations for peace on enduring moral principles which find their source in the fundamental God-given dignity of the human person. Indeed the Holy See's activity in the international forum stems from this specific vision of the human person, and from the conviction that when it is undermined or abandoned the very foundation of human society is shaken. It is a perspective which calls for the advancement of freedom attained through the guarantee of fundamental human rights. Not least of these rights are: unprejudiced access to the employment market, full participation in democratic civic life, and freedom of authentic religious practice. Each confirms the equality of all citizens.

The recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have given Pakistan unprecedented attention in the international media. Against the backdrop of these human tragedies there has arisen an opportunity – indeed a duty – for your nation to contribute greatly to the peace for which the human family longs. Your Government's recent efforts to root out the evil perpetuated by fundamentalist

groups bent on terrorism have been rightly welcomed across the globe. Similarly, Pakistan's current courageous gestures and proposals which are breathing new life into the dialogue for peace with India have brought renewed hope for rapprochement and for a reduction in the vast sums spent on maintaining a high level military presence in the Kashmir region. Such initiatives bring a sense of relief not only to your own peoples but also to the international community as a whole. These measures are viewed as positive steps towards the building of a civilization of love in which all peoples can be secure and live in peace.

In addition to a nation's responsible and willing participation in the accords and agreements intended to promote improved international relations, authentic development also requires adherence to a plan of genuine national progress. Such a programme will always respect the rights and legitimate aspirations of the people, including those of minority groups. It also demands transparent government and an impartial judiciary system. Without these foundations of civilized society the hope for progress, to which every human being aspires, remains elusive. For this reason I have said on numerous occasions that corruption, whether it be on the part of politicians, judiciary officials or administrators and bureaucrats (cf. *Ecclesia in Asia*, 8), is a scourge which affronts the inviolable dignity of every human person and which paralyzes a nation's social, economic and cultural advancement.

Your Excellency, I am pleased to acknowledge the considerable political reforms which have recently been implemented in Pakistan for the improvement of civic life. The abolition of the separate electorates system and the preservation of the reserved seats allocation has done much to restore the faith of all Pakistanis – not just those of the ethnic and religious minorities – in the Provincial and National electoral processes. This move has been publicly lauded by, among others, the Catholic Bishops of your country. Nevertheless it must also be noted that the grievances which continue to be felt particularly among the Christian minority in your country detract from the overall well-being of the nation. The grave difficulties that the Blasphemy Laws cause and the incidents of violence and vandalism against Christians and their properties have been well documented. But there are also the lingering questions of inequality of access to jobs in the workplace and unequal treatment of minority groups in public institutions, whether they be pupils in schools or persons before the law courts. The constitutional guarantee of civil and religious rights must be reflected in the employment and service policies of government departments and become an example for other sectors of public life to emulate. Without the concrete enactment of recognized fundamental human rights the growth of any society will remain stifled.

The Catholic Church, in service of the human family, is prepared to reach out to all members of Pakistani society without distinction, striving to build with them a civilization of love founded upon the values common to all peoples of peace, justice, solidarity and freedom. With greater participation of missionaries in the life of the Church, her schools and health-care facilities could contribute more extensively to the country's human development programmes. I am confident that

you can rely upon the Church to continue to work for the genuine progress of Pakistani society, especially through her assistance of the poor and the relief of suffering.

Your Excellency, you begin your mission at a time in history when the international community is looking to Pakistan with great expectations and high hopes of progress towards peaceful development in both the national and international spheres. I assure you of the Holy See's support for all that promotes the common good of humanity. The various departments of the Roman Curia are ready to assist you in carrying out your duties and I am sure that your service will strengthen the bonds of understanding and cooperation between Pakistan and the Holy See. Upon you, your family and your fellow citizens I cordially invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty God.

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