



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. MR KOUAMÉ BENJAMIN KONAN,
AMBASSADOR OF CÔTE D'IVOIRE TO THE HOLY SEE***

Saturday, 10 January 2004

Mr Ambassador, I am pleased to greet Your Excellency on the occasion of the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire to the Holy See. I thank you for the cordial greetings you have just addressed to me on behalf of the President and of the Government of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire and in your own name. I should be grateful to you if you would kindly reciprocate to H.E. Mr Laurent Gbagbo my best wishes for him and for the accomplishment of his important office at the service of the Nation. Through you, I would like to greet the entire people of Côte d'Ivoire. The memory of the warm welcome that I always received on my three Visits to your noble Country lives on in my mind and in my heart. I ask God to guide and support it in its efforts to advance along paths of a lasting peace, so that the new-found tranquillity may enable all to benefit from a peaceful and dignified life. You have just recalled, Mr Ambassador, the desire of the Authorities of Côte d'Ivoire to spare no effort to bring about an effective *national reconciliation* between all its inhabitants, with a view to the peaceful settlement of the serious crisis your Country has been experiencing since September 2002. I ardently hope that the process of national reconciliation will be pursued and intensified and that the altercation of weapons will surrender to the weapons of dialogue. The wish to complete the disarmament of the different parties engaged in the fighting is an important stage on the way to peace, for it shows the noble aspiration to say "yes" to dialogue and "no" to violence, to enable the various members of the Nation to advance together on the paths of concord and national unity. I am sure that this disarmament will involve all the weapons currently in the people's possession and thereby contribute to the inner stability of the Country. The prospect of the freedom of movement of citizens and goods should also permit Authorities to restore the peoples' confidence and enable them to meet their basic elementary needs. To further a rapid return to the conditions of normal life, it would be well to re-establish without delay the relations between the institutions and the different branches of the administration, indispensable instruments for the smooth functioning of public life, and the relations between the Authorities and the citizens, for we all know that these infrastructures, equipped with staff who work for the common good, are essential to a country's dynamism. Likewise, it is up to the political leaders to ensure that schools, essential links in educating the young generations in an altruistic sense of duty through an apprenticeship for life in society and acceptance of the fundamental values for social coexistence, are equipped to impart to students the teaching to which

they have a right. Once the cogs of society turn more smoothly, an imperative desire will grow in everyone to surmount the challenges standing in the way of reconciliation, brotherhood and the Nation's development. In this spirit, the return to dialogue and respect among all the subjects of Côte d'Ivoire by means of consultation and negotiation will be a new opportunity to practise increasingly the noble ideals of freedom, solidarity, hospitality and religious tolerance to which you have just referred. Building up relations of trust between the human and religious communities that make up your Country is very important and a necessary condition for dispelling fear of others and rediscovering the benefit of living side by side. I appeal to the religious leaders and members of all the communities to do their utmost in this task that is essential to the stability, development and prestige of the Nation. Likewise, mutual trust, which must always inspire and imbue the social, political and economic life of a country at all levels, should be rooted in the promotion of the universal moral values such as respect for human rights and a sense of the dignity of every person. This trust cannot be lived to the full if it is not founded permanently on love. As I recently had an opportunity to recall, "Love is also the loftiest and most noble form of relationship possible between human beings. Love must thus enliven every sector of human life and extend to the international order. Only a humanity in which there reigns the 'civilization of love' will be able to enjoy authentic and lasting peace" (*Message for World Day of Peace 2004*, n. 10). May each one's effort, in all the social categories, combine to reinforce relations of trust and to teach one another in a respectful, responsible and disinterested manner, to solve conflicts peacefully, developing an ever greater awareness in the people of Côte d'Ivoire of the contribution your Country is called to make to furthering the precious good of peace on your Continent and throughout the world, with a view to building a true family of nations! Mr Ambassador, you brought up the role and work the Catholic Church in Côte d'Ivoire does with a view to participating in a specific way, through the voice of her Pastors or the initiatives of her members, in the peaceful resolution of the conflict in your Country. I am delighted to hear it. Through you, Mr Ambassador, I would like to greet with affection all the members of the Catholic community who live in Côte d'Ivoire or in the diaspora. United with their Pastors, may they increasingly act as true Gospel witnesses and be a leaven of unity and reconciliation, living and presenting clearly the values contained in the Christian message! Supported by the motherly protection of the Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Peace of Yamoussoukro, they will be able to work patiently with all people of good will to banish the fears and prejudices that hinder people from building a renewed and supportive society. Mr Ambassador, you also highlighted the active role that the Catholic Church has embraced with international organizations to guarantee material, medical, psychological and spiritual help to the population of displaced and traumatized people who are victims of conflicts. Christ's love, which she wants to witness among all humanity, invites her to concern herself with all human beings, giving priority to the weakest and those who are suffering. Rejecting all forms of division that endanger the pursuit of the common good and wishing to make known the Good News of Christ, she knows that she is called, through her work in health care and social and charitable assistance as well as in education, to contribute to the integral fulfilment of persons and peoples in conformity with their vocation. I invite her to persevere in this effort, especially in the guidance she can give families: "It is from the family that citizens come to birth and it is within the family that they find the first school of the social virtues that are the animating principle of the existence and development of society itself" (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, n. 42). Your Excellency, at the end of our meeting and 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 you, Your Excellency, upon those who work with you, upon your family, upon the citizens of Côte d'Ivoire and their Leaders, abundant divine

Blessings.

