



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE TO NIGERIA, BENIN

GABON AND EQUATORIAL GUINEA

***ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS****

Lagos (Nigeria)

Tuesday, 16 February 1982

*Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

1. It gives me great pleasure to meet here so many distinguished members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Federal Government of Nigeria. In you I greet not only the eminent representatives of various Governments, but also all the people of your nations. Wherever I travel I cherish the opportunity of meeting the members of the diplomatic community. While representing directly your respective Governments, you and your colleagues are also among the foremost builders of an international community that reaches beyond the confines of any particular territory.

Indeed, you are called to foster the common good of the world community over and above legitimate national interests.

2. On many occasions I have expressed my profound appreciation of the service which diplomats perform. The Holy See itself, which is always intent on promoting peaceful and fruitful relations with the civil authorities, is always happy when stable relations are established between itself and these States which so desire. The Apostolic Nuncios and Pro-Nuncios are among my most valued collaborators, and the Heads of the Missions accredited to the Holy See at the Vatican are highly esteemed partners in our common search and efforts to promote a climate of brotherhood and solidarity among all people of good will. With mutual deference for the respective prerogatives of Church and State, so much can be achieved in open dialogue and loyal collaboration for the benefit of mankind – for the benefit of every human being. No one who is serious about fostering the well-being of the human person can escape international cooperation. I know, Ladies and Gentlemen, that you are deeply aware of the need to pool all resources and efforts in order to build for mankind a world order of peace and justice.

3. Yours is a lofty mission and a constantly new challenge. Your task has been variously described as the fine art of doing what is politically possible to reconcile opposed or even contradictory interests between countries, to represent your own country's role in the international domain, and to build bridges between peoples of different origins and cultural identity. Whatever may be emphasized as the distinctive characteristic of your mission, it is evident that diplomats must always distinguish themselves as specialists in dialogue and partnership.

We stand at the threshold of the third millennium and ours is an exciting period of history, with undreamed-of opportunities in the scientific and technological fields, but also fraught with contradictions and constant deadlocks in mutual relations. It is imperative to move beyond the kinds of viewpoint or fixed positions that tend to make dialogue difficult or impossible. This is done by making the dignity of the human person – every human person – the basis and starting-point for better relations. While the human person is paramount, it is also true that the human person belongs to a particular group or nation, that he cherishes certain values inherent in his historical and cultural heritage, and that he aligns himself with certain positions. This is normal and natural. Hence there exists a variety of social structures and political options that can advance the common good while truly respecting human dignity. But artificial and unnecessary oppositions easily result in polarization and impede the dialogue and the true partnership that are capable of overcoming obstacles and resolving deadlocks.

Dialogue between peoples and nations, despite economic, monetary and material inequalities, must take place on the basis of equality in dignity and in sovereignty. Economic or monetary superiority, the possession of material goods and resources or technological capacity do not justify political or social, cultural or moral superiority of one people or nation over another. This further means that any position that seeks to justify such alleged superiority on an ideological or philosophical basis is not a valid position and must be rejected. True dialogue and partnership demand a constant reference to the fundamental truth about man: the dignity and quality of the human person, individually and as a member of a society.

4. Your mission, Ladies and Gentlemen, assumes a special dimension and urgency because it has placed you in the Third World. The plight of many Third World countries remains a constant reminder that the development issue is not dead, although one sometimes gains the impression that it is no longer viewed with the priority that it continues to deserve. Many of the world's governments today seem more preoccupied with other matters, such as inflation and military security. And yet, despite the impressive level of economic growth which some developing countries have achieved over the past decades, millions of people still remain caught up in a poverty that not only means low incomes, but also malnutrition, hunger, illiteracy lack of education, persistent unemployment and reduced life expectancy.

In my latest encyclical I drew attention to this situation, especially when I stated that "the disproportionate distribution of wealth and poverty and the existence of some countries and continents that are developed and others that are not call for a levelling out and for a search for ways to ensure just development for all". I referred to "a disconcerting fact of immense proportions; the fact that, while conspicuous natural resources remain unused, there are huge numbers of people who are unemployed or underemployed and countless multitudes of people suffering from hunger".

Integral human development deserves special attention too in that it serves a vital function in the great cause of international peace. Peace throughout the world is possible only when there is internal peace in each country. And

internal peace will never be attained until each nation gives sufficient attention to the promotion of a just development which is advantageous to all its citizens.

This decade too must listen to the prophetic utterance of Paul IV who, fifteen years ago, proclaimed that the “new name of peace is development”. With these words he called millions of people to accept new responsibility for peace and offered a new hope to the needy and downtrodden of the world.

Thus it is necessary to devise ways of urging governments to continue to make the development issue a top priority in their formulation of new policies and programmes. It is likewise important to insist on a development which respects the dignity and inalienable rights of the human person, and not merely a technological or economic development. In this framework, integral human development is closely linked to the pursuit of equality and justice and to a sincere concern for the weakest and poorest members of society.

5. Integral development, like peace itself, requires also the serene climate of human freedom. Here too, as diplomats, you must have an unalterable conviction and an irrevocable commitment.

Individual human beings must express freedom in the actual power of choice, in the responsible determination of their actions, and in that self-mastery which excludes exterior constraint. So too whole peoples must be able effectively to enjoy rightful autonomy and independence and exercise them in national sovereignty, without outside interference. And it is your own national sovereignty which you are endeavouring to represent so worthily within the one family of a humanity that embraces all nations.

6. Ladies and Gentlemen, you are eminently well placed to promote dialogue and true partnership, and to build bridges of mutual understanding for the benefit of all. In a world and a continent so full of promise and yet so ravaged by dissensions, exploitation, in justice, misunderstandings and all kinds of threats to peace, you have a splendid role to play: to foster justice, to work for reconciliation and to reinforce human solidarity. You are called to be outstanding peacemakers, generous servants of your fellowman in the cause of development, and faithful defenders of true freedom. May God bless you in this exalted assignment.

*AAS 74 (1982), p. 619-622.

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