



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. Mr ELIAS NAJMEH,
AMBASSADOR OF SYRIA TO THE HOLY SEE**

Thursday, 24 April 1997

Mr Ambassador,

1. I welcome Your Excellency with joy on the occasion of the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Syrian Arab Republic to the Holy See.

I thank you, Mr Ambassador, for conveying to me the wishes of his Excellency Mr Hafez al-Assad, President of the Syrian Arab Republic. I would be grateful if you would reciprocate my respectful wishes for his person and for lengthy service to all his compatriots, as well as my best wishes for those who are responsible for serving the nation and the whole people of Syria.

2. You have recalled the importance of the traditional spiritual and moral values of your compatriots and the inhabitants of your region, marked by the history of St Paul, one of the pillars of the Church, who was tirelessly committed to developing these same values with the peoples he met. It is still essential today to give priority to these values which encourage authentic dialogue between the members of the monotheistic religions and put persons and different religious groups on an equal footing in society. As I recently recalled, the leaders of nations have the serious responsibility "to direct by their decisions harmonious living between different peoples, cultures and religions" ("[Urbi et Orbi](#)" Message, 30 March 1997, n. 5).

3. Dialogue, whose importance you have stressed, implies freedom of conscience and the religious freedom of persons and families. This basic freedom is a school of humanity and brotherhood for all believers (cf. [Message on the 50th Anniversary of the End of the Second World War in Europe](#), n. 12, 8 May 1995). It contributes to building an increasingly welcoming society. In

fact, through respect for their own spiritual identity, men and women feel that their person is better appreciated and are thus more capable of committing themselves to the social development of the country which they love, since it is their land of origin. This vision must inspire the regional situation, and each one must strive, despite difficulties, to support the search for a just and lasting world peace.

But, in all nations “peace cannot be just nor can it long endure unless it rests on sincere dialogue between equal partners, with respect for each other’s identity and history, unless it rests on the right of peoples to the free determination of their own destiny, upon their independence and security” (*Address to the Diplomatic Corps*, n. 3; *L’Osservatore Romano* English edition, 13 January 1997, p. 6).

Like their Muslim brothers and sisters, Syrian Catholics draw their dynamism from religious practice, essential to their faith, in the heart of living communities called to gather regularly around their pastors. Although in your country they are sparse, they hope to be involved with their compatriots in the service of peace and in building the nation. You know, Mr Ambassador, that the efforts of the Church and of Christians are particularly oriented to the integral good of persons and peoples, by reason of the spiritual, religious and moral mission of the Church within the international community, a mission to which you have kindly referred.

4. I am particularly sensitive to your Government’s words of esteem for the Apostolic See's efforts to promote peace, justice and interreligious dialogue. Everywhere in the world, the Catholic Church strives to express her contemporaries’ thirst for dignity and justice, and to lead people on the way of peace; she acknowledges and greets the attention of the international community and the many actions undertaken in this domain in past years. But she also measures how far each people still has to go to rediscover its freedom without ambiguity, and each country, its full sovereignty (cf. *Address to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See*, n. 7, 12 January 1991; *L’Osservatore Romano* English edition, 14 January 1991, p. 2).

In the cause of peace, the Church, which has a role distinct from that of the civil authorities, desires only to serve the common good (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 76).

Because of her special attention to man, without usurping the place of the country’s legitimate authorities, the Church and Christ’s faithful present in the different nations also desire to participate in educating consciences in the essential principles and fundamental values of social life, such as respect for the inalienable dignity of every human being, solidarity and brotherhood between all the human members of a nation.

5. At the beginning of your mission, I offer you my best wishes. Be assured that you will always receive from my co-workers an attentive welcome and cordial understanding, to help you succeed in your activities.

I wholeheartedly invoke the Almighty's blessings upon Your Excellency, the leaders and the people of Syria.

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