



The Holy See

***DISCOURS DU SAINT-PÈRE JEAN-PAUL II
À S.E. M. SIMÉON AKÉ, NOUVEL AMBASSADEUR
DE LA CÔTE D'IVOIRE PRÈS LE SAINT-SIÈGE****

Lundi 3 mars 1997

Mr Ambassador,

I am pleased to welcome you to the Vatican, where I have the pleasure of receiving Your Excellency on the occasion of the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Cote d'Ivoire to the Holy See.

I am touched by the cordial sentiments of President Henri Konan Bédié, which you have conveyed to me. In return, I would be grateful if you would kindly express to him my best wishes for his person and for carrying out his high office in the service of his compatriots. I also address my warm greetings to the people of Cote d'Ivoire and to its leaders, and I pray God to guide the efforts of each individual on the ways of integral development and of national prosperity in peace and solidarity.

In your address, you have wished to express Côte d'Ivoire's eagerness to build a harmonious society, respectful of the cultural and religious diversity of its people and welcoming to all. Mutual respect and understanding among everyone in the country are in fact an essential condition for social peace and for the nation's authentic development. Whereas injustice and discrimination cause misunderstanding which most frequently leads to conflict and to ruin, authentic democracy, which respects pluralism and is based on dialogue as well as on the African values of community life and sharing, cannot fail to reinforce national unity and the constitutional State.

I rejoice at Côte d'Ivoire's commitment to promoting peace in your region. Dialogue and negotiation are the only sure ways to quell tensions and settle conflicts. While the African

continent is experiencing tragic events, one can only ardently wish to see the recourse to peaceful means prevail over violence everywhere in settling differences, so that weapons may be silenced and peoples experience a time of peace and prosperity.

As you stressed in your courteous speech, Mr Ambassador, the Church's universal mission leads her to strive for harmony between nations and persons. In my Message for the World Day of Peace, I wrote that in this world wounded by war, «there are many factors which can help restore peace, while safeguarding the demands of justice and human dignity. But no process of peace can ever begin unless an attitude of sincere forgiveness takes root in human hearts» (Message for the World Day of Peace 1997, n. 1.). Forgiveness and reconciliation are the ways to strengthen the bonds of solidarity between individuals and peoples. Peace will be born of this solidarity. How can we fail to hope that a true «civilization of love» will finally be established everywhere!

Your presence in the Vatican as ambassador, after the long and esteemed mission of Ambassador Joseph Amichia testifies to the importance your country attaches to the religious and spiritual dimension in its projects for social development and personal growth. In fact, «a better world will come about only if it is built on the solid foundation of sound ethical and spiritual principles» (Ecclesia in Africa, n. 114). Your noble words witness to the spirit in which you intend to carry out the lofty mission entrusted to you, helping further to strengthen the long-standing relations between Côte d'Ivoire and the Holy See.

Allow me, Mr. Ambassador, to take this opportunity, through you, to greet the Catholic Church in Côte d'Ivoire, whose structures have recently been increased and strengthened. I keep her Pastors and her faithful ever in my thoughts and prayers, and in the happy memory of my visits to your country. As we are involved in the immediate preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, I warmly encourage them to rediscover the demands of their Baptism, which is the basis of their unity in Christ. I also invite them to join their compatriots in building a nation based on justice and right, by constantly and courageously seeking unity and brotherhood among all citizens.

As you begin your official mission To the Apostolic See, I offer you my best wishes for its successful achievement. Be assured that you will always receive a gracious welcome and cordial understanding from all who work with me.

I invoke an abundance of divine Blessings on Your Excellency, on your family and on all the people of Côte d'Ivoire.

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