



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR
OF THE REPUBLIC OF INDIA TO THE HOLY SEE***

Friday, 13 December 2002

Mr Ambassador,

It is my pleasure to accept the Letters of Credence by which you are appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of India to the Holy See. I am most grateful for the greetings you bring from His Excellency Dr. Abdul Kalam, the newly-elected President of India, and I would ask you to convey my good wishes to him and to the Government and People of your beloved country.

As Your Excellency has noted, there has been a strong Christian presence in India almost since the beginning of Christianity itself, a presence which has contributed its share to the rich and diverse cultural heritage of the sub-continent. In recent history, contact between independent India and the Holy See led to the establishment of the diplomatic relations which your presence here today confirms and strengthens. These relations are an expression of the wide areas of shared outlook on important issues of international life which unite us in the service of the universal common good.

Today, when serious threats to cohesion and peace are straining international relations, there is ample room for us to work together in the international arena to foster a thoughtful and principled approach to the matters which continue to cause tensions between peoples and nations.

I continue to treasure vivid memories of my pastoral visits to India in 1985 and 1999, when I was able to witness at first hand the harmony and cooperation existing between people of diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. This harmony is one of the pillars on which the unity of the Nation has been built and clearly it needs to be reaffirmed today if great harm and injustice are to be avoided. On many occasions I have spoken of ancient India's role in cradling and nurturing

cultures and traditions which have left a profound mark on the human spirit, and which still now are essential sources of wisdom and creative impulses which can help in no small way to counteract some of the negative consequences of the processes of globalization now taking place. I refer to the danger of the commercialization of almost every aspect of life, to the point that the profit motive and not the value of the human person dictates policies and modes of behaviour.

One of the recurring themes of my pontificate has been the affirmation of the conviction that true human progress can only be secured when there is effective and guaranteed respect for the inalienable dignity and rights of every human person. The world is still far from achieving this goal, as can be easily seen in the many forms of injustice and discrimination still inflicted on the weak in too many parts of the world. It is the solemn duty of every democratic system to promote and protect basic human rights and every category of these rights. This means not only those that refer to material survival but also those that relate to the human spirit in its unending quest for truth and freedom. Today the international community stands very much in need of a renewed and more effective commitment to meeting the needs of so many people seeking relief from their sufferings and aspiring to a proper education that will enable them to take an active part in the life of the community and nation to which they belong.

An integral part of a development which truly serves the good of individuals and peoples is respect for religious freedom, for this is the right which touches upon the individual's most private and sovereign interior freedom. Nothing can be more damaging to social harmony and peace than the denial of this touchstone of human rights. India has strong traditions of respect for religious differences. It is my hope, Mr Ambassador, that for the good of the Nation contrary tendencies will not be allowed to develop and that the rule of law will ensure that violations of this principle will not go unchecked.

The last few years have been difficult ones for India and her neighbours as regional tensions and violence have resulted in loss of life and home for many people. Peace is a gift born of trust and must be steadfastly built up. In my address to the Fiftieth General Assembly of the United Nations in 1995 I said: "We must learn not to be afraid, we must rediscover a spirit of hope and a spirit of trust. Hope is not empty optimism springing from a naive confidence that the future will necessarily be better than the past. Hope and trust are the premise of responsible activity and are nurtured in that inner sanctuary where man is alone with God". I can assure Your Excellency that the Catholic Church in India will continue to pray and work for these goals. Together with their fellow citizens of other traditions, Catholics share a deep desire for enduring peace and harmony in a society which values and fosters the dignity and rights of all its members.

Mr Ambassador, I am confident that as you undertake your mission the longstanding bonds of friendship and cooperation between India and the Holy See will continue to be strengthened and enriched. I offer you my good wishes and assure you that the offices of the Roman Curia will always be ready to assist you. Upon Your Excellency and your fellow citizens I invoke the

abundant blessings of Almighty God.

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