



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC
OF SUDAN TO THE HOLY SEE****

Friday, 17 May 2002

Mr Ambassador,

1. I am pleased to welcome you on the occasion of the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of the Sudan to the Holy See.

I warmly thank you for your words, that show that your country's authorities are intent on developing relations of esteem and cooperation between the Sudan and the Apostolic See, for more fruitful diplomatic action. I would be happy if you would express in return to President Omar Hassan Al-Bachir, whose courteous greetings you have conveyed, my good wishes for his wellbeing and for the accomplishment of his high office at the service of the nation. Through you, I would also like to send my cordial greetings to all the citizens of the Sudan, with prayers to the Most High that he will grant them the energy they need to build in concord and in unity an ever more peaceful and fraternal society.

2. In recalling the on-going tragedy that continues to afflict the Holy Land, Mr Ambassador, you state that any nation wishing to embark on the road to progress and development must work tirelessly for the achievement of lasting peace, founded on justice and forgiveness. At the prayer meeting of Assisi last 24 January, in the presence of the leaders of the great world religions, I recalled that the commitment to justice and the ability to forgive are the indispensable "pillars" of a lasting peace. In fact, it is indeed essential that nations work for justice with respect for the dignity of persons and peoples; this presupposes that each member of the national community should be conscious of both his rights and his duties, and that those in charge of the common good should see to the equitable distribution of profits and tasks among individuals and local communities. This commitment must be joined to a real will to work for the reconciliation of the national communities

and an opening to pardon, the only attitude that can heal hearts and restore in depth broken human relationships.

Today, when your country is seeking concrete and suitable solutions to a spiral of violence that is so harshly trying your civil populations and their goods, I express my strong desire that all your citizens may find the path of loyal and responsible collaboration, to help end once and for all the conflicts which have brought nothing but wretchedness to the country for so many years. The gradual modernization of the economy, institutions and way of life goes hand in hand with a constructive dialogue for peace and a serious commitment to laying down arms. These are the conditions that will pave the way to a reconciled and united society.

3. In this perspective, it is desirable increasingly to work for mutual understanding and respect for all, that necessarily lies in the respect for the right to life and to their own identity of the minorities present within the country. This is the clear sign of a society that knows how to integrate the cultural riches that belong to it as well as how to foster the participation of everyone in the country's political, economic and social life. At the same time, it is important for people to reject any discrimination based on ethnic, cultural or religious criteria. National unity is built by accepting diversity, finding out how to make it contribute to the common good and to the full development of all the members of the population.

4. Mr Ambassador, you emphasize that the Government of the Republic of the Sudan is concerned to strengthen religious freedom, particularly by including such freedoms in the new Constitution. As I recalled on the occasion of my Pastoral Visit to your country in 1993, "The freedom of individuals and communities to profess and practise their religion is an essential element for peaceful human coexistence. Freedom of conscience and freedom to seek the truth and to act according to one's personal religious beliefs are so fundamentally human that any effort to restrict them almost inevitably leads to bitter conflict" (*Address to the President of Sudan*, 10 February 1993, n. 5; *ORE*, 17 February 1993, p. 15). Freedom of this kind does not jeopardize the life of society, because every true religious life allows persons who profess a religion to discover that they are brothers and sisters in humanity with all their compatriots.

5. Allow me, Mr Ambassador, through you to greet the Pastors and faithful of the Catholic population of the Sudan, who are courageous in their trials and desire daily to witness to their Christian hope and to evangelical values. May they pursue in charity their important mission of serving Christ by serving their brethren, sustained by the prayers of St Josephine Bakhita! The Catholic Church will always be ready to place her skills and her institutions at the service of the human advancement of the Sudanese in such areas as education, health care and social assistance. She fulfils this mission in fidelity to her Lord and with the conscious desire, especially through loyal dialogue with her Muslim brothers and sisters, to open new paths to the justice and peace that the peoples so ardently await.

6. Mr Ambassador, as you begin your official mission with the Apostolic See, I offer you my cordial good wishes for the noble task that awaits you. Be assured that you will find in my collaborators the attention and understanding that you may need.

Your Excellency, I willingly invoke upon you, upon the leaders of your country and upon the people of Sudan, an abundance of divine Blessings.

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