



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. Mr MIROSLAV PALAMETA
AMBASSADOR OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA
TO THE HOLY SEE***

Friday, 27 February 2004

Mr Ambassador, I am pleased to receive the Letters of Credence with which the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina accredits you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Holy See. In offering you a cordial welcome, I warmly thank you for your courteous words. I would also like to convey my respectful greeting to the three Members of the above-mentioned Presidency. I likewise greet the Peoples made up of the other inhabitants of Bosnia and Herzegovina, who are all equally close to my heart and present in my prayers. Love for those dear populations impelled me to go on pilgrimage to Bosnia and Herzegovina in [April 1997](#) and in [June 2003](#). I thank God who made possible these two unforgettable Visits. They were especially useful in enabling me to take into account the difficulties and hardships caused by the recent warfare and to witness to my solidarity and closeness with those who continue to suffer its consequence. I felt that these Journeys were required by my pastoral mission to bring the message of love, reconciliation, forgiveness and peace to each one. I wanted to strengthen my Catholic brethren in faithfulness to the Gospel, so that they might continue to be "builders of hope", together with all the others who consider Bosnia and Herzegovina their homeland. Only peace in justice and reciprocal respect, only the promotion of the common good in an atmosphere of authentic freedom are suitable conditions for building a better future for all. Moreover, since the outbreak of hostilities at the beginning of the 1990s, the Apostolic See has been working so law and order can be restored in the region. Mr Ambassador, "the joy and hope, the grief and anguish" (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 1) of the inhabitants of this part of Europe have always echoed in the Pope's heart. Many economic, social and political problems and challenges have yet to be faced. I am thinking in the first place of the unsolved problem of refugees and exiles from the Banja Luka region, from Bosanska Posavina and from other parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, who are waiting to be repatriated in full security to lead a dignified life. These brothers and sisters of ours cannot be left on their own, nor can their hopes be disappointed. The more time passes, the more urgent becomes the duty to respond to their legitimate expectations: their suffering calls for our solidarity. Possible situations of injustice and marginalization should be dealt with and resolved, guaranteeing each People of Bosnia and Herzegovina its respective rights and duties, assuring them equal opportunities in every social circle through democratic structures that can counter the temptation to take advantage of one another. This demands a

constant and sincere commitment to democracy and to its harmonious development, in the knowledge that democracy is promoted only through the constant work of education and requires adherence to a common patrimony of ethical and moral values and constant attention to the legitimate needs and aspirations of individuals, families and social groups. Democracy must be built day by day with patient tenacity, using tools and methods that are always worthy and respectful of a civilized society. I encourage Bosnia and Herzegovina to take the path of peace and justice without hesitation. I would also like to recall that in order to guarantee the rights of individuals and groups, effective equality of all before the law and a concrete respect of neighbour are indispensable. In this regard, it is appropriate to create the conditions for sincere forgiveness and authentic reconciliation, putting aside hatred and resentment and all memory of past injustices and artificially-created prejudices.

This great task demands the effective collaboration and serious commitment of all the members of society, including political leaders. The Church, conscious of her mission in the world, has already achieved much in this respect, and will continue to collaborate with total availability. The existing differences cannot, of course, be disregarded; on the contrary, it is necessary to respect them and keep them duly in mind, ensuring that they do not become the pretext for disputes, or worse, for conflict, but are considered a common enrichment. Those with responsibility at various levels are called seriously to seek to resolve the problems that beset the local populations, by proposing solutions that are advantageous for all, putting the human being, his dignity and his legitimate needs at the centre of attention. This is the challenge of a multiethnic, multireligious and multicultural society precisely such as that of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Despite the persistence of numerous difficulties, the peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina are continuing to nourish the lively hope that they will be able to solve their current problems, thanks to the help of the international community that has so far played an appreciable role. Bosnia and Herzegovina would like to join the other European countries to build a common house. May this aspiration be achieved as soon as possible. May that "strip" of Europe which has so deeply suffered for several centuries make its own special contribution to the process of European integration that is under way, with equal rights and duties. The Holy See backs this process of unification and hopes that with the contribution of one and all a great family of peoples and cultures will be built in Europe. Indeed, United Europe is not only an extension of boundaries, but supportive growth with respect for every cultural tradition, in the commitment to justice and peace on the Continent and throughout the world. Mr Ambassador, at the time when you are beginning your important office as representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the Holy See, I wanted to communicate to you these thoughts that I have particularly at heart. I would like to assure you that my collaborators will be pleased to give you all possible assistance in the fulfilment of your noble mission. Please convey to the Members of the Presidency, to the other Authorities and to the Peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina my fervent good wishes for constant progress in peace and in justice, accompanied by the assurance of my daily prayer, so that all may bless God through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin

Mary.

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