



The Holy See

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

Friday, 13 December 2002

Mr Ambassador,

1. I am happy to welcome you, Your Excellency, for the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Rwanda to the Holy See.

I was grateful for the courteous words you addressed to me, and I would be pleased if you would express my gratitude to H.E. Mr Paul Kagame, President of the Republic for the good wishes he has conveyed to me through you. I also greet with affection the entire Rwandan people, imploring God to help them emerge from the trials they have been through. Since for many years the country has been at the mercy of hatred and violence, it is up to all the members of the nation to take an every more responsible part in planning and putting into practice appropriate political, economic and social solutions. By fostering national unity with respect for sensitivities and opinions, they will allow the present and future generations to learn again how to live as brothers and sisters in a reconciled and prosperous country.

2. You recall, Mr Ambassador, that the requirement of equitable justice is certainly the only foundation on which a state can build true peace and a strong democracy at the service of the integral development of all citizens without exception. One can only appreciate the efforts made in your country to promote justice: it is to be hoped that they bear fruit. This will contribute to reinforcing the national unity and to uprooting the culture of impunity that can only create hatred, exacerbating the inequalities between persons and the ethnic communities. It is a matter of allowing Rwandans to set out firmly and confidently on the path of effective reconciliation and sharing, while sincerely striving to seek and to express with courage the truth about the circumstances that led to the genocide. In a special way this implies giving up ethnocentrism, which gives rise to the domination of some over the others. It also means looking positively at the

ground remaining to be covered to reach peace together.

3. The path of national reconstruction and harmony among all the inhabitants, on which Rwanda has set out, is also a path of democratization. It passes through an ever greater attention to certain aspects of democracy: the defence of public freedoms, the concern for political pluralism, respect for the fundamental dignity and rights of human persons and communities. Your country's new Constitution is in the process of being drafted. May the text, the result of the collaboration of all the citizens, strengthen the national unity, promoting and guaranteeing human, moral and spiritual values which will enable all Rwandans to play an active role in the life and growth of the nation! The universal values such as respect for human life, a sense of the common good, the acceptance of the repatriated, support of families, are a precious heritage that constitutes a source of hope, not only for Rwanda, but also for the whole Region of the Great Lakes, which is called to find the strength of mind and necessary political courage to establish a lasting and supportive development.

4. Over the years the Catholic Church has worked to formulate pastoral proposals which help people to be reconciled to one another and encourage their inner healing. I am delighted to know that the authorities of your country hope to assure her a more stable opportunity to exercise her mission freely. You may rest assured that she wants to work tirelessly at the service of peace and brotherhood among people, educating their consciences and their hearts so that they may be better equipped to face the present situation; she carries out her mission in this way, sharing her hope in the future and participating in the social and spiritual rebuilding of Rwandan society, with respect for the local traditions.

5. Mr Ambassador, permit me through you to greet affectionately the bishops and the Catholic community of your country. I know that they have faced harsh trials with all their compatriots, and I thank the Lord for their tenacity and fidelity in proclaiming the Gospel of life and forgiveness. In these days that herald the future for the life of the nation, I invite them never to slacken their efforts to show their brothers and sisters that God has not abandoned nor forgotten them. On the palms of Christ's hands, pierced by the nails of the crucifixion, is written the name of each Rwandan (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*, n. 143). I encourage the Catholics of Rwanda, especially the young generations, to be daring and generous peacemakers, working to overcome the causes of division and to develop a society that is ever more prosperous and united!

6. At the beginning of your mission to the Holy See, I am happy to offer you my very best wishes. You may rest assured that you will always find here, with my collaborators, the attentive and understanding welcome which you may need.

I cordially invoke an abundance of divine Blessings upon you, Your Excellency, and upon your family, as well as upon the entire Rwandan people and their leaders.

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