



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. Mrs ELIZABETH YA ELI HARDING
NEW AMBASSADOR
OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE GAMBIA TO THE HOLY SEE*

*Clementine Hall
Thursday, 13 December 2007*

Your Excellency,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the Vatican as you present the Letters of Credence by which you are appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of the Gambia to the Holy See. I am grateful for the courteous greetings and sentiments of good will which you have expressed on behalf of His Excellency Colonel Yahya Jammeh, President of the Republic. As I willingly reciprocate, I ask you kindly to convey my gratitude and good wishes to His Excellency, to the civil authorities and to the Gambian people.

Diplomatic relations between the Republic of the Gambia and the Holy See were formally established in 1978. These relations, which the Holy See willingly establishes with individual countries, are a privileged opportunity to work together for the promotion of many important values favourable to the genuine growth of human society. Close and cordial relations can be of great advantage to both parties, especially in areas related to the defence of the life, the dignity and freedom of every human person and the promotion of the health, social development and education of less favoured groups of the population.

Christian love is the force that motivates the Church in your country as it offers its service to the Gambian people through the promotion of important values such as justice, solidarity and peace. The Catholic Church in Africa is committed directly to spread the message of Jesus and consequently to give witness to the love of Almighty God through the practice of charity, like the good Samaritan of the Gospel story (cf. *Ecclesia in Africa*, 41). A similar witness of love and the

values of hospitality and compassion are also practised by followers of other religions in your country. In this regard I am pleased to recognize the cordial and peaceful relationship existing in The Gambia between the members of different religions. It speaks well of the friendly disposition of your people and their genuine religious sentiments. I pray that this good atmosphere will be consolidated and protected from the corrupting influence of ideologies that would use religion for political ends.

The Gambia's future is interwoven with the future of West Africa. The Holy See looks with hope on the efforts to consolidate peace in the region. Nothing can dispense with the process of political dialogue where differences are harmonized and group expectations readjusted for the common good of the people. The Gambia has already given an example of this approach in a recent international dispute. I encourage your country to continue along this noble path in the solution of external and internal differences.

Your people continue to aspire, and rightly so, to a life of well-being in dignity and freedom. They seek improved political and social conditions that guarantee growth through initiative, creativity and exchange. The Catholic Church gives its full encouragement and cooperation to all African Governments who strive to strengthen the rule of law and eradicate corruption, to curb political harassment and the abuse of power (cf. *Ecclesia in Africa*, 112). In all spheres of life, especially in public affairs, the value of openness to others and submission to truth is the cornerstone of a human society worthy of the name. The commitment to truth is the soul of justice; it establishes and strengthens the right to freedom and opens the way to forgiveness and reconciliation (cf. *Address to the Diplomatic Corps*, 9 January 2006). Political institutions and public officials are by their very nature open to legitimate control and criticism since they serve the common good of the country and the needs and aspirations of the people whom they represent (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 75). A political climate based on the respect for truth is an indispensable foundation of civil society. Love of their nation should encourage all, authorities and citizens, political parties and the media, to contribute actively to the consolidation of a healthy, open and respectful political environment.

While The Gambia as such has been spared the scourge of war, it still labours under a number of hardships. The Government and its respective departments and ministries, other agencies and political parties are attentive to these situations and can count on the loyal and generous cooperation of the Catholic Church. Living standards and sanitary conditions of sizeable segments of the population require continued attention. I encourage all to become involved in the promotion of the essential equality and complementarity of man and woman. Likewise the struggle against AIDS has to continue on the medical and especially educational fronts. Promiscuous sexual conduct is a root cause of many moral and physical ills and must be overcome by promoting a culture of marital faithfulness and moral integrity. The displacement of populations and the influx of refugees, seeking freedom from the many miseries that armed conflicts bring with them, is still a pressing problem which strains available resources. I am aware of the difficulties involved and I encourage the people and the institutions, public and private, who offer their service to those in

need. At the same time I appeal to the international community to play a generous part in supporting this humanitarian task.

Madam Ambassador, these are some of the thoughts that arise from the Holy See's attentive consideration and appreciation of your country and the African Continent. I wish you every success in your mission. You may count on the willing and open cooperation of the Offices of the Vatican and the Roman Curia. I am pleased to renew once again my good wishes to His Excellency President Jammeh, to the Government and people of your country. May Almighty God bestow upon the nation abundant and lasting blessings of well-being and peace!

**Insegnamenti di Benedetto XVI*, vol. III, 2 2007 p.831-833.

L'Osservatore Romano 14.12.2007 p.4, 5.

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