



The Holy See

LETTER OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE ARCHBISHOP OF GITEGA AND THE CHURCH IN BURUNDI

*To the Most Reverend Simon Ntamwana
Archbishop of Gitega
President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Burundi*

When the Church in Burundi is joyfully celebrating the Assumption of the Virgin Mary with a pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Peace in Mugeru, I am pleased to extend a cordial greeting to the Bishops, priests, men and women religious, catechists and all the faithful of this beloved country, which despite so many trials has continued to live in hope.

Present in heart in this place where your people express their faith, I pray with you that the Lord will lead all the nation's children on the ways of peace and reconciliation. I warmly encourage people of good will to continue their efforts to achieve this peace, so ardently desired, with courage and self-denial. I forcefully address a new appeal to the aggressors and to all the country's authorities to set aside individual interests and to commit themselves with renewed zeal to the service of the common good of Burundi's people, who have suffered so many trials and privations and aspire to live in dignity and safety.

However, it is only in the human heart that genuine peace can be built. This demanding task is entrusted most particularly to Christians: they have received the mission to bear witness that Christ came to bring the Father's love to the world. I therefore urge them to a true interior conversion and to resolutely reject any impulse to seek to re-establish justice by taking revenge. Indeed, the search for peace involves a sincere effort and determined will on everyone's part to change his life, even if this is often difficult and obliges him to swim against the tide of accepted ideas and of certain traditions. In accepting the grace of reconciliation in their own family first, Christians are called to build the civilization of love, which is the only guarantee for building a more just society and lasting peace.

The feast of the Assumption of Mary invites us to turn our eyes to our most holy Mother who guides and sustains the hope of God's People who are still on their way (cf. *Preface of the Mass for the Assumption*). May she be for all the people of Burundi the model of a life totally given to God and

neighbour with a generous, loving heart. May each one find in her a living source of tenderness, peace and trust which will help him to persevere in his efforts to build a Burundi that is ever more fraternal and supportive!

On this feast day, when you are celebrating the 25th anniversary of your priestly ordination and have the joy to ordain numerous ministers, priests and deacons, a sign of great hope for the Church which has been so tried in your country, I invoke the motherly protection of Our Lady of Peace on all the inhabitants of Burundi, and I offer a warm Apostolic Blessing to you, as well as to Cardinal Ersilio Tonini who is visiting your country, to the Apostolic Nuncio, to the Bishops, to the clergy and to all the faithful of Burundi.

From the Vatican, 4 August 1999.

JOHN PAUL II