



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. Mr OLLI MENNANDER
AMBASSADOR OF FINLAND TO THE HOLY SEE***

Thursday, 24 April 1997

Mr Ambassador,

1. I welcome Your Excellency with great pleasure at the presentation of the Letters accrediting you to the Holy See as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Finland.

I ask you kindly to convey to Mr Martti Ahtisaari, President of the Republic of Finland, my cordial thanks for his friendly message which you bring me. In turn, I offer him my best wishes for the successful accomplishment of his task in the service of all his compatriots. I thank you for your courteous words with regard to myself. They witness to noble sentiments, which I have deeply appreciated; they also reveal your attention to and understanding of the Apostolic See's action and its spiritual and moral mission in favour of peace, of solidarity among people, human rights and the dignity of every being.

2. Mr Ambassador, you have mentioned several aspects of international life, appropriately recalling the role your country has played in the development of European relations, especially within the *Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe*, whose foundation has been linked to your land by the signing of the Final Act in Helsinki on 1 August 1975. All the countries on the continent are invited to take part in building a Europe of peace and solidarity, so that the institutions established really are at the service of peoples. In this regard, I am grateful to your government and your compatriots for their participation in the efforts to achieve peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina, through dialogue with the hostile forces and by constant technical assistance, so that the people of that land may equip themselves with the democratic institutions indispensable to public life and give a new momentum to their economy for the good of all.

For the future of the European continent where troubling sources of tension still exist, and for peace and friendship between peoples, it is more important than ever for nations to take sound institutional measures together; this will reinforce trust and collaboration between the different governmental authorities and between the peoples who live on this continent. Such a step will benefit all Europeans and will foster the spiritual, moral and economic growth which is essential in a period when the crisis is affecting many individuals and many families.

3. Mr Ambassador, you recalled the issue of human rights about which the Holy See is deeply concerned, for it is the expression of the greatness and inalienable dignity of every human being, of the moral sense and of attention to each one's place in society. Indeed there is a close link between the value of the person and the service required of him for the common good. As could be seen in a certain number of conflicts, refusal to guarantee the inviolability of the human being can only have harmful consequences on social life. For as a member of a nation, man must work with and for his brothers and sisters, but, created in God's image, his being and his life are not restricted to their community dimension. The spiritual man is at the service of humanity, but society is ordered to human advancement.

4. As I have already written in the Encyclical *Evangelium vitae*, I rejoice at the "growing moral sensitivity, more alert to acknowledging the value and dignity of every individual as a human being, without any distinction of race, nationality, religion, political opinion or social class" (n. 18). More than ever before, our contemporaries are called to guarantee the protection of the primordial right to life and human dignity of every person who has been conceived, and the development in societies of a culture of life. In this spirit, the formation of our contemporaries' moral conscience is essential, so that they tirelessly react when human dignity is demeaned. Especially for health-care personnel, this must go as far as to include the possibility, freely recognized, of exercising conscientious objection, to avoid committing acts irreconcilable with their philosophical beliefs and faith.

5. Your visit to the home of the Successor of Peter enables me to recall the presence of the Catholic faithful in your country. They are very few, but they appreciate the freedom they are allowed in the exercise of their Christian life; by promoting the primordial moral values that are the basis of human dignity and lead to fraternal life, they would like above all to play an active part in the social life of their country, in a cordial and constructive dialogue with all the components of the nation, and particularly in an ecumenical spirit with Finland's different religious communities.

I am also thinking of all your compatriots, an important number of whom are today suffering the effects of the economic crisis which is affecting the continent. I hope that, in a constant impulse of national solidarity, each individual may find his place within society, and have the means to live in dignity with the members of his family. Thanks to their sense of sociability and the values of acceptance and sharing which are their hallmark, your fellow citizens are also invited to make their specific contribution to building the Europe of peoples. Thus they will discover that exchanges

between the nations on the continent are a source of benefit for all, and they will advance the cause of justice and peace, to live happily in their land.

6. At the beginning of your mission as representative of the Republic of Finland, Mr Ambassador, I wish you an enjoyable stay in Rome. I can assure you that you will always find attentive support and a cordial welcome with my coworkers.

I most willingly invoke an abundance of divine blessings on your Excellency, on the Finnish people and on all those who are responsible for their destiny on the threshold of the third millennium.

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