



## The Holy See

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### ***DISCORSO DI GIOVANNI PAOLO II***

***A S.E. IL SIGNOR JUL BUSHATI,***

***AMBASCIATORE DI ALBANIA PRESSO LA SANTA SEDE\**** *Sabato, 5 dicembre 1997*

Your Excellency,

1. I am pleased to welcome you in your capacity as the new Ambassador of Republic of Albania to the Holy See. My respectful thoughts are first addressed, to Prof. Rexhep Mejdani, President of your Republic. Please express my cordial greetings to him and my appreciation of his devoted sentiments, which you have conveyed to me.

As you have just recalled, for the past few years Albania has been experiencing a period of profound social change. After the end of the harsh communist regime, the country you represent is now opening up, through sometimes dramatic events, to a new period of democracy and integration into the great family of European peoples, to which it belongs not only because of its geographical location, but especially because of its millenary history and culture.

2. In recent months I have followed the events leading to the present political situation with particular attention and spiritual participation. I am constantly aware of the suffering and hopes of the many Albanian citizens who, driven by need and the desire for a better future for themselves and their loved ones, leave their country, frequently by inadequate means and under precarious conditions. While I hope that the international community will take charge of this urgent problem with measures inspired by solidarity and justice, I wish to promise the Catholic Church's effective collaboration in seeking appropriate solutions to their precarious condition in their homeland and elsewhere. It is important that just and decent living conditions be guaranteed to everyone. In this regard I would like to make my own the Albanian Bishops appeal to Europe, "to consider the issue of Albania with a greater and more effective commitment".

3. The recent crisis, which has shaken the Republic of Albania and has had worrying repercussions in Parliament, must make both the Government and the opposition particularly keen to embark on the way of dialogue and collaboration. One must avoid the temptation to focus on clashes with one's political adversary, in the first place because it is morally unacceptable but also because such an attitude is always harmful for consolidating a correct democratic dialectic and for the complete development of all the country's citizens.

Several times this year the Bishops were indeed right to point out that rejection of hatred and reconciliation with God and neighbour are the best way to a real future of peace and prosperity. Thus they invited Albanians to do all they can to restore an efficient public order by lawful means, and to restore security to citizens in their everyday lives, through new

trust in the State's legitimate institutions. To achieve this goal, every effort must be made so that those with illegal weapons may hand them in as soon as possible and that the local police force and the army may be further organized.

4. In making these suggestions the Catholic Church "is not motivated by an earthly ambition but is interested in one thing only to carry on the work of Christ under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, for he came into the world to bear witness to the truth, to save and not to judge, to serve and not to be served" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 3). She takes an active part in the country's social life, working so that it may advance towards a future of peace and prosperity. The many Catholic missionaries who during the recent political crisis chose to remain at their posts, despite danger and hardship, bore witness to this sincere desire to share the lot of the Albanian people. Their work received significant recognition not only from Catholics, but also from numerous Muslims and Orthodox.

5. The new climate established in the Albanian Republic since the end of the tragic communist dictatorship has permitted the Catholic Church to begin a significant work of evangelization and human advancement, by reopening churches, setting up new pastoral centres, founding schools and dispensaries, and through a network of services sponsored by Caritas.

In order that this activity on behalf of the Albanian people can continue and increase, I hope that, with the consensus of all the political forces, a new Constitution and appropriate laws will be drafted to give a sound legal basis to fundamental human freedoms, including that of religion.

The climate of tolerance that has always marked the social harmony of the one Albanian people, made up of citizens of different faiths, is well-known. It is rooted in a long-standing tradition of mutual respect between Muslims, Orthodox and Catholics, Albania's three historical religions. May this precious and jealously guarded heritage be an important foundation for the material and spiritual rebuilding of Albania.

With these sentiments, as I am pleased to receive your Letters of Credence, I hope that the lofty mission entrusted to you may be rich in the satisfaction that the Lord never fails to grant to those who generously serve their brothers and sisters. At the same time, I assure you of a constant remembrance in prayer, as I invoke the blessing of almighty God on you, Mr. Ambassador, on those who govern your noble country and the entire Albanian people.

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