



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. Mr. ALTAN GÜVEN
NEW AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY
TO THE HOLY SEE***

6 December 1997

Mr Ambassador,

It is a pleasure for me to welcome you to the Vatican and to accept the Letters of Credence appointing you Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Turkey to the Holy See. I am grateful for the cordial greetings which you bring from His Excellency President Süleyman Demirel. I wish to take this occasion to reaffirm my deep respect for the people of Turkey, and I ask you to convey to His Excellency the assurance of my prayers and my best wishes for the peace and well-being of the nation.

You have mentioned the friendship which for many years has marked relations between your country and the Holy See. I share the hope that ever more effective forms of cooperation will develop between the Holy See and Turkey. When both are concerned to find ways of strengthening world peace, it follows that there are many areas open to mutual understanding and support.

Two general principles constitute the basis of all social organization and the foundation of peace in the world. The first is the inalienable dignity of each human person, irrespective of racial or ethnic origin, cultural or national character, or religious belief. The second is the fundamental unity of the human race, which takes its origin from the one God, the Creator (cf. [*Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace of 1989*](#), No. 3). The Holy See's work in the promotion of peace is based on the commitment to defend the dignity of every human being. Human dignity concerns not only the person's individual existence but also the cultural and religious dimensions essential

to his relationships with others. Hence, true harmony within a nation and between countries can only be maintained if the natural and legitimate differences between peoples, rather than being repressed as a cause of division, are seen as an enriching reality. Your Excellency has referred to the problem of discrimination against those forced to find work in other countries. In the light of the principles mentioned, this is clearly a question which needs to be addressed in a spirit of dialogue and of openness to the contribution which immigrants, in the diversity of their experience and customs, can make to the society which welcomes them. Genuine harmony is the result of the patient and painstaking dialogue between the parties involved, a dialogue in which each side seeks the good of the other while safeguarding its own.

Turkey's rich historical and cultural heritage inspires many of your fellow citizens to look towards a fuller integration into the European family of nations. The ever increasing interdependence of nations in terms of commercial and political relationships is an acknowledged fact of the contemporary global situation. However, it is imperative that this interdependence be elevated and transformed into effective international solidarity. Solidarity is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say, to the general good of everyone and that of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all (cf. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 38). This applies also to countries: there will never be genuine peace if one country prospers while its neighbour is in need. The richer and stronger nations have a duty to assist developing nations, not only financially but also in the educational and scientific fields, leading to their real promotion and progress (cf. *Populorum Progressio*, 48). As a bridge between Europe and Asia, your country serves as a reminder that the more prosperous countries of this continent should be ever more ready to respond to the needs of peoples even beyond its borders.

Integral human development involves more than material prosperity. Rigorous respect for the cultural, moral and spiritual needs of individuals and communities, based on the dignity of the person and on the specific identity of each community, is an essential requirement for the well-being of every society (cf. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 33). In this respect I am heartened to hear your kind words about the contribution of Catholics to Turkish society and your assurances regarding their freedom to practise their faith. Religious freedom, which includes freedom to worship and to educate future generations in the faith, is of fundamental importance for civic harmony. It is a condition for minority religious groups to consider themselves full citizens of the State and it encourages them to take a full part in the development of the nation. The members of the Catholic Church in your country, though few, are proud of their national heritage and have the good of their homeland very much at heart.

It is important that the various religious groups present in a nation should relate to one another with mutual respect and tolerance. Interreligious dialogue will do much to foster such relationships. The existence within a country of different religious and ethnic groups represents both a challenge and an opportunity, particularly to political leaders and legislators. Civil authorities need to be very much aware of the legitimate claims of the various groups and respond to them in an appropriate

way. Respect for the various cultural and spiritual traditions of the peoples living within the borders of the State allows that country to present itself within the international community as an example of that peace and harmony which should prevail throughout the world.

Your Excellency has spoken of the important occasion of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. The land of Turkey is rich in memories of the missionary journeys of the great Apostle Paul. The first seven Ecumenical Councils took place in what is now your country. In these years of preparation, Christians are reflecting on the mysteries of faith, many of which were discussed by our Fathers in the faith at the great Councils held at Nicaea, Constantinople, Ephesus and Chalcedon. For Christians, these represent fundamental points of reference regarding our faith in God and the Incarnation. The Jubilee is above all a spiritual event. The Christians who will travel to the places connected with their faith will do so above all as pilgrims, for whom religious celebrations in the many places associated with the beginning of the Church's life will be the highlight of their visit. You emphasize the willingness of the Turkish Government to cooperate in the organization of the celebrations for the Jubilee, and I am grateful for its readiness to host the many who will visit these venerable sites, so dear to all Christians.

Your Excellency, I offer you my good wishes for the success of your mission as your country's Ambassador. The various departments and offices of the Holy See will be only too ready to assist you in the fulfilment of your lofty duties. Upon yourself and the Government and people of Turkey I invoke abundant divine blessings.

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