



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR
OF THE REPUBLIC OF TUNISIA
TO THE HOLY SEE***

Friday, 18 May 2001

Madam Ambassador,

1. I am pleased to welcome Your Excellency to the Vatican for the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Tunisian Republic to the Holy See.

I thank you for your courteous words, and I would be grateful if you could convey to President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali my cordial wishes for himself and his compatriots. As I remember the warm welcome I received during my visit to Tunis, I ask the Most High to grant all Tunisians to continue their efforts with a view to building a supportive and fraternal nation where each person can find a fitting response to his proper aspirations and live in justice and peace.

2. In your address, you emphasized Tunisia's attachment to freedom of conscience and the free practice of all religions. The Tunisian peoples' generous tradition of hospitality and the respect they offer their guests are indeed well known and honour the whole nation. I am delighted with the part your country has played for many years in establishing a sincere dialogue between the cultures and religions. This commitment is an important contribution to building ever stronger relations between the human and religious communities. In fact, just as I wrote in my *Message for the World Day of Peace* of 1 January 2001, "Dialogue leads to a recognition of diversity and opens the mind to the mutual acceptance and genuine collaboration demanded by the human family's basic vocation to unity" (n. 10). If this dialogue is to continue and to develop in the truth, it is indispensable that the States guarantee to all their citizens and all who live in their territories full religious freedom, thereby respecting the conscience of each individual who must be able to

choose freely and responsibly with regard to religious matters, safeguarding the common good.

3. As you know, the respect and dignity of the person in all life's contexts is an essential principle of the Catholic Church that must guide those responsible for public life. Furthermore experience shows that ignorance of the transcendent value and fundamental rights of the human person can only lead to violence and instability.

If it is to become a constitutive and constant element of social life, respect for the person must be inculcated from the earliest age through education to which everyone, boys and girls, must have equal access. I am pleased to know that in Tunisia a considerable effort is made to give all young people access to knowledge. It is necessary, in fact, to help each one to fulfil his personal, human and spiritual capacity. However, education must also open spirits to solidarity and mutual respect between individual persons and between human and religious communities, for the promotion of the individual must go hand in hand with the service of the common good. In this way there will develop a renewed awareness of human dignity and the inalienable character of the fundamental rights of every person. From that moment, every citizen must be able to exercise the rights inherent in his human dignity and freely contribute to the social and political life of the national community, enabling each to put his skills at the service of society.

4. The current situation in these past weeks, especially in the Holy Land, shows the need to work with ever more daring to promote peoples' right to live in peace and safety. I would like to say once again that violence cannot solve the problems of coexistence among peoples; it can only make their solution even more difficult. The search for justice in mutual trust and in conformity with the international laws alone can help lead humanity on paths of true peace, where the rights of each people to life and development are respected. I encourage the efforts your country has made in harmony with the international community to break new ground in the quest for peace and solidarity among nations everywhere in the world, but particularly in the Middle-East.

5. Through you, Madam Ambassador, I would like to extend a cordial greeting to the Bishop of Tunis and to the entire Catholic community of your country. I know their attachment to Tunisia, their esteem for its culture and their desire to continue a sincere and fraternal dialogue with the believers of Islam. At the beginning of this new millennium, I take this opportunity to invite Catholics to grow constantly in their faith, in deep communion with one another and with the whole Church, so that through their witness of life at the service of God and their brethren they may be daring artisans of peace and brotherhood, respected by all.

6. As you begin your mission, I offer you my cordial wishes for the noble task that awaits you. Be assured, Madam Ambassador, that you will find here with my co-workers, the attentive and understanding welcome you may need.

I cordially invoke an abundance of the Almighty's Blessings upon you, your family, and the people

and leaders of the Tunisian nation.

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