



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR OF ETHIOPIA TO THE HOLY SEE*

Thursday 15 May 2003 Mr Ambassador, As you present the Letters of Credence by which you are appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia to the Holy See I offer you warm greetings and welcome you to the Vatican. With gratitude for the good wishes which you bring from the President and Prime Minister of your country, I ask you to convey to them my own cordial good wishes and the assurance of my prayers for the well-being of the nation. I also take this opportunity to express my whole-hearted support for the continuing peace process: it is my fervent hope that all concerned will work with courage and vision to ensure that a just and lasting peace based on mutual understanding, reconciliation and cooperation will once again be firmly established. In this regard, I am pleased to note the active involvement of the international community as the initial cease-fire was brokered, as the subsequent agreements on the cessation of hostilities were drafted, and in offering continued assistance for the full implementation of the provisions of these accords. Particularly worthy of mention is the Ethiopian-Eritrean Boundary Commission, which has its headquarters at The Hague, and also the recent resolution of the U.N. Security Council extending the mandate of the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea. There is no question as to the inestimable value of the help which the worldwide family of nations offers in this process, but this involvement in no way replaces the need for the parties immediately concerned to manifest clearly their goodwill and resolve in addressing the situation: their sincerity and commitment remain essential for overcoming any difficulties and tensions which may arise. I therefore encourage every effort aimed at restoring direct dialogue between the Ethiopian and Eritrean Governments. Only in this way can true reconciliation be achieved, leading to the normalization of relations, the re-opening of borders, mutual exchange between populations, and a definitive end to the risk of military conflict. The independence of States can no longer be understood apart from the concept of interdependence: in our modern world all nations are interconnected, for better or for worse. In order that relationships of mutual interdependence may become channels for effectively improving the lot of mankind in every part of the globe, leaders at all levels — whether regional, national or international — must act in accordance with universal moral principles, rejecting situations of injustice and of institutional corruption. This is nothing more than what is required by good governance. As I said earlier this year to the members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See: "The material and spiritual well-being of humanity, the protection of the freedom and rights of the human person, selfless public service, closeness to concrete conditions: all of these take precedence over every political project and constitute a moral necessity which in itself is the best guarantee of peace within nations and peace between States" (*Speech to the Diplomatic Corps*, 13 January 2003, 6). Your Excellency has mentioned the democratic and economic reforms currently under way in Ethiopia. Projects such as these, which seek to promote

genuine progress in the social, economic and political spheres, call for a strong and unwavering commitment to the inalienable rights and dignity of the human person. In fact, the safeguarding of fundamental rights and respect for human dignity are the prerequisites for integral human development. The human person must ever remain the focal point of all development. And it is precisely in this area that the Church has an important contribution to make: for through her social teaching she seeks to increase moral awareness of the demands of justice and solidarity, demands predicated on the incomparable worth and centrality of the human person. Sharing with the people of our time a profound and ardent desire for a life which is just in every aspect, she does not fail to examine the various aspects of the sort of justice which the life of people and society demands (cf. *Dives in Misericordia*, 12). A key element in the harmonious coexistence of individuals and groups is freedom of conscience, a necessary expression of which is religious freedom. Here, Your Excellency's reference to the constitutional assurance of freedom of religion in Ethiopia is most heartening. The Church herself is a tireless promoter of the right of individuals and organized religious communities to profess and practise their faith freely. In fact, respect for religious freedom serves as an indication and a guarantee of authentic social progress, and religious freedom itself is an indispensable component of any public policy which seeks to serve human dignity. It is this freedom that allows the Catholic Church in Ethiopia, always in keeping with her specific nature and mission, to be actively involved in practical efforts aimed at the improvement of society and at responding to concrete human needs. Ethiopian Catholics are committed to working hand in hand with their fellow citizens as active participants in the political, social and cultural advancement of their nation. They do this in imitation of their Lord, who "came not to be served but to serve" (*Mt 20:28*). It is for this very purpose that many missionaries — members of religious communities and lay men and women — have come to your country offering their services not only in the area of Catholic ecclesial life, but also in the broader fields of education, health care and social services. The work they do is not for the benefit of Catholics alone, but for the good of all the people. It is my hope that the Government of Ethiopia and the public authorities will welcome this service on the part of the Church and will assist Catholic missionaries and others as they seek to continue these efforts aimed at the building up of Ethiopian society. Mr Ambassador, as begin your diplomatic mission to the Holy See, please know of the readiness of the various offices and agencies of the Roman Curia to assist you in the fulfilment of your responsibilities. Assuring you of my good wishes for the success of your work, I cordially invoke upon you and upon the leaders and people of Ethiopia the abundant blessings of Almighty

God.

* *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. XXVI, 1, p. 748-751.

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