



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. Mr JUAN GAVARRETE SOBERÓN
AMBASSADOR OF GUATEMALA TO THE HOLY SEE***

Thursday, 2 September 2004

Mr Ambassador,

I am pleased to receive you at this ceremony for the presentation of your Letters of Credence as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Guatemala to the Holy See. I offer you a cordial welcome and thank you for your kind words, as well as for the greetings from your President. H.E. Mr Oscar Berger Perdomo, which I reciprocate; please convey to him my best wishes for the peace and well-being of the entire Guatemalan People.

Your Country, Mr Ambassador, is known as "the land of eternal springtime". Providence has permitted me to visit it three times since my election as Successor of Peter. I have thus been able to come into contact with this noble People whose ancestry is millenary. The proclamation of the Gospel has given rise to manifestations of faith that are deeply rooted in the Guatemalan culture. I recall the beauty of your landscapes, the hospitable character of your People and especially the pure faith of the Ecclesial Community that lives there. The joyful and devout experience of faith in Jesus Christ is most solemnly expressed in the celebrations for the Holy Week procession that overflow with love for the Redeemer of man who died and rose. My first two Visits to Guatemala were in 1983 and 1996, when a grievous civil war was still being fought and was causing so many deaths. My third Visit, in July 2002 after the Peace Agreements had been signed, enabled me to meet a cheerful people full of hope following the results obtained. On that occasion I canonized Br Pedro de San José de Betancurt in a vast celebration that gathered the faithful from all over Guatemala and Central America. They thanked God for the gift of this humble saint who, although he was a native of the Canary Islands, chose this Country in which to become holy on the path of charity, prayer and penance, as well as by service to the poor and the sick. His memory stays alive and his charism lives on in the Bethlemita Order; inspired by his teachings, it has brought forth abundant fruits of holiness, such as Mother Encarnación Rosal who was the first Guatemalan Blessed. In the Messages I delivered on these Visits, I wanted to express my affection for the beloved Guatemalan People, but also my concern at the human and social problems with which they have to deal. I am pleased to note that the protection of human life from conception to natural death is recognized in your Nation's Constitution, which does Guatemala honour. In

this area as in others, when civil legislation embraces natural law peoples advance on the path to peace and progress. Mr Ambassador, you referred in your address to the Government's desire to fight all forms of corruption, to reduce the gap between those who have everything and those who lack the basic necessities, and to join forces to continue building a better Nation. Transparency and integrity in public management foster among citizens an atmosphere of credibility and trust in their leaders and lay the basis of a just and desirable development. In this task, the public Authorities will find in the Church, with her simple resources but the strength of her firm convictions, an appropriate collaboration in the search for solutions, recognizing her efforts to increase the citizens' awareness and sense of responsibility and fostering the participation of all. Guatemala cannot disregard the violence that unfortunately harasses many, even after the end of the civil conflict. I would like to remind you that among the many victims there has been no lack of ministers of the Church and servants of the Gospel, such as Bishop Juan Gerardi who was assassinated in 1998 and whose case has not been fully solved, as well as various priests and catechists. No stone should be left unturned in the effort to achieve social peace in the Country and the reconciliation of all the citizens. Another problem is the poverty that affects the lives of so many of your fellow citizens. The effort to meet the needs of the most deprived must be considered a fundamental priority. I am pleased that it is an objective to which your Government is dedicating energy and funds. Many of those who suffer this social scourge belong to the indigenous populations. Although it is true that some of the poor have managed to achieve a more dignified lifestyle with greater educational opportunities and a more numerous presence on the national scene, others are submerged in poverty and alienation. The rapid changes in the international economy and the fall in the price of agricultural products have put many in a difficult situation. The Church, mother and teacher faithful to her mission, closely accompanies the many farming families who today are suffering the consequences of this crisis. This is another of those areas in which the various public bodies and the Ecclesial Community can profitably combine their action in the service and advancement of the poor. Before concluding this meeting, I would also like to address a word of closeness and encouragement to the large Guatemalan community that has emigrated to other countries, mainly to North America. The distance of these people from their Homeland is a consequence of their desire to find a better standard of life. Nevertheless, they should not forget that they must preserve and increase the rich cultural and religious values that are part of the knowledge they took with them, and in their present situation they should feel committed to contributing solutions to the Country of their birth, which still today continues to consider them as its sons and daughters in spite of the distance and time. Mr Ambassador, I would now like to offer you my very best wishes for the fulfilment of your mission to this Apostolic See. Please convey my greeting to the President of the Republic and to all the People of Guatemala, with the reassurance of my prayers for their integral development. I ask God to help you in the mission you are beginning today, and I invoke every heavenly Blessing upon you, your distinguished family, your collaborators as well as the government Authorities and citizens of Guatemala.

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