



The Holy See

VIAGGIO APOSTOLICO IN TOGO, COSTA D'AVORIO II, CAMERUN I,
REPUBBLICA CENTRO-AFRICANA, ZAIRE II, KENYA II, MAROCCO

***INCONTRO DI GIOVANNI PAOLO II
CON IL PRESIDENTE DELLA REPUBBLICA,
I CORPI COSTITUITI DELLO STATO E
I MEMBRI DEL CORPO DIPLOMATICO***

Yaoundé (Camerun) - Lunedì, 12 agosto 1985

Mr. President, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

1 How could I not be touched by your warm words and the noble thoughts you have just expressed? I thank His Excellency, President Biya, and through him I express my gratitude to all who have contributed to my welcome in this charming country of Cameroon which I have the great joy of visiting as pastor of the universal Church. This evening I have the honour of addressing the political authorities of this country and the diplomatic corps. I consider this meeting to be very important in light of your grave responsibilities for the progress of Cameroon and the peace of the world.

2 I extend my respectful greetings and my good wishes, first of all, to yourself Mr. President. Having taken an important part in the service of your country for many years, you have for nearly three years been the supreme Magistrate. Yours is the difficult responsibility of promoting the unity of your nation, of helping all forces converge towards development, while seeking to assure the well-being of all Cameroonians and developing the country in the vitality and the renewal that is necessary. With you I greet all those who work at this great enterprise as members of government, those who undertake it on the level of planning political options, as members of the Central Committee or the national political bureau of the Democratic Assembly of Cameroonian People and those who have legislative responsibilities as members of parliament. May God aid you in the conduct of your public affairs in the service of your countrymen.

3. Cameroon seems to be effectively a crossroad of cultures, languages and religions, open to both the francophone and anglophone worlds, at the heart of Africa and typical of it. Such a situation certainly requires the diverse groups to have a spirit of tolerance and dialogue, respect for the particular conditions of culture and religion, a consideration for local responsibilities and the rights of each person, mutual esteem and fraternal co-operation. This also demands, on the national level, a great vigilance to observe this spirit overall, to avoid certain groups being in a sense bullied by others, and to assure the participation of all in the common good.

That is the situation with which Cameroon must contend. It is more demanding than some uniform situations. However, a union which knows how to integrate harmoniously this bundle of diverse realities and personal values is fortunate to be all the more rich in humanity. For her part, the Catholic Church lives in a similar situation on a universal scale. In this very country I have visited four regions with rather diverse pastoral problems; I was able to hear in the liturgy a symphony of varied linguistic expressions. Our communion is woven of that very "Catholicity", no one is excluded from our sympathy, from our dialogue. I have just met with a delegation from the Protestant Churches and later with the Moslems.

4. Cameroon, however, cannot remain a mosaic of particular interests. It is a sovereign state, a unified Republic. It is a single nation. It is your task to revive its conscience and to bring the efforts of all its citizens, the contributions of all its cultures to converge for the common good. You seek to develop this patriotic sentiment which makes Cameroonian people proud of their national identity. You desire, and rightly so, that all people actively participate in public life, with a respect for order, the higher good of the nation and the rights of others, in order to prepare a worthy future for all the children of this country, assuring them as much as possible an equality of opportunity. It is an immense task that involves realizing your integrated projects of rural development, moral and intellectual formation of the youth, and the creation of jobs, at the same time facing problems of health, housing, urbanism, transportation, salaries and social welfare.

5. All countries, but most especially those of the Third World have to take up the economic and social challenge with limited means and they must mobilize all their energies. It is important to devise a manner of doing this which in itself develops the best qualities of the human being without resorting to a constraining system which makes man lose his liberty, without, too, letting the influences of money blindly and egotistically increase their control to the profit of a few. It falls on all to avoid the paralysing effects of excess bureaucracy and the evils of corruption, fraud and waste. One must rejoice to see the degree to which you have put into practice the call of the officials of this country for a moralization of behaviour; for a strictness of management; for professional integrity, competence and conscience; for work done well; for perseverance in effort; for a sense of responsibility; for a concern for the common good; for self sacrifice; and for the search for social justice for all.

6. The Church appreciates your ethical concern, and she hopes that it will bear fruit. Certainly in

every country of the world she tries to ensure that her religious goal, her methods and her doctrine, which is a message of spiritual life first before involving moral dignity as a consequence, are not confused with those of the State. She always remains free in her judgment of moral realities. She invites all to a progress in justice and charity which takes into account all the personal and community elements and which surmounts the ever recurring risks of egotistic immobility or the abuse of power.

The Church also thinks that the State cannot fulfil her noble task of education of the civic sense if she does not sufficiently rely on intermediary bodies, on the more restricted natural communities, and on the various circles which also have an educational role. I am thinking primarily of the families which must be encouraged in stability and in their mission and of schools which deserve to be well supported to the extent that they integrate this moral and spiritual formation in their instruction.

It remains that it is the formation of consciences to integrity, to a sense of personal responsibility, to solidarity with others that is precisely what the Church seeks as a projection of the Christian message into social life. She is happy when she observes the convergence of her activities and the efforts of those in political authority.

7. You know that the Holy See gladly participates in the community life of Nations, whether it be in diplomatic relations which her status permit her or in international meetings to which she is invited. At the beginning of each year, I myself have the opportunity of explaining to the assembly of ambassadors attached to the Holy See the principles which guide our action; the untiring quest for peace in dialogue, the necessity of de escalation in armaments, the safeguard of fundamental human rights and liberties, the consolidation of juridical instruments to ensure more justice, the solidarity which is necessary, especially between the North and South, effective steps in consideration of basic human needs of nutritional subsistence and hygiene, and in general humanitarian concern for all those «who are left abandoned along the path of history» (cf. Address to the Diplomatic Corps, 15 Jan. 1983, no. 4). Today without taking up those points on a global scale, I would like to envisage with you the common good of the African continent where you fulfil your mission. It seems to me that this good comes most especially through respect for Africa's identity and her dignity, through contributing to her economic development, and through encouraging her moral progress. Such is the question put to our consciences: what are we to do, what can we do to favour sincerely the good of all our brothers and sisters of Africa?

8. First of all, dignity presupposes a true national independence (cf. Address to the Diplomatic Corps, 14 Jan. 1984, no. 2). This is now the situation in almost all the countries of the African continent and we hope that those who are not yet independent (here I especially refer to Namibia) will become so without delay and in an honourable and peaceful manner like all the other African Nations. This level of independence, joyously achieved within the last twenty five years, must permit the fulfilment of the anticipated effects as well as those already attained. Who could deny

that this is a key point for the full responsibility of the interested Nations, for a development consistent with their own proper human, moral and spiritual values, and a reenforcement of understanding and solidarity among the countries of Africa? As for independence, it will not resolve by itself the grave problems of the evolution of a country. Many people still fear a more subtle form of economic or cultural dependence, coming from the outside, in which they undergo certain ideological influences which they have permitted to penetrate their civilization.

In addition to their hopes for complete liberty in the conduct of their internal affairs, the countries of Africa would doubtless wish that those of other continents would, on the international level, take into greater account their propositions and decisions which, in general, bear the stamp of moderation and do not call for violence.

Finally, what these young independent Nations would like to achieve now would be self-sufficiency.

9. Economic self-sufficiency does not mean that a country closes in upon itself; this is neither possible nor desirable. It is, however, normal that each African country take responsibility for its own development and be encouraged to do so, utilizing all the natural resources at its disposal and assuring progress in production adapted to its needs. It is also desirable that there should develop where it already exists, a solidarity with the other African countries of the same geographic area, and may it be established where it does not yet exist. These natural relations of neighbouring States have already borne happy results.

I equally salute the efforts of the Organization of African Unity; how could one not want this unity, like the unity of other continental organizations, to progress in order to ensure a cohesive advancement towards an equitable solution of Africa's diverse political and social problems.

Finally, it is necessary that the international community continue and even increase its aid, considering the state of urgency in several African countries in regard to famine, health and investments. One can hope that the problems of East West security will not polarize the concern and the use of resources too much in the so called countries of the North: may they be more concerned about the increasing disparities between them and the so-called countries of the South, and understand that interdependence is a question of survival for them also. The point to which the countries of the Third World, however, are rightly sensitive is the framework in which this mutual help comes: they will not accept that it should involve a deterioration of the terms of exchange or certain injustices of trade or investment. They want to be aided fairly to get out of the inextricable problem of loans and the overburdening debts into which they have been led to engage at great risk. Those who truly seek the good of Africa, whether they be from North or South, will be able to reconsider these problems with equity and open the way to realistic and just solutions, safeguarding the dignity of the countries which have the right to progress in development.

10. If such a progress is not authentic except in justice, it is not possible except in peace. Africa needs peace. She cannot tolerate wars, not even the ruinous guerrilla wars which take their toll in human life and destruction, which necessitate a build up in military expenses and inflame passions, changing brothers into enemies. Who could take part in these fratricidal, and, in some cases even genocidal wars?

In the face of continuing or reawakening conflicts, everyone must honestly question their causes. The injustices committed by certain regimes against the rights of man in general or the legitimate claims of a part of the population which is denied participation in common responsibilities, unleash upheavals of a regrettable violence; it cannot be appeased, however, except by the re-establishment of justice. It is also true that certain external interferences inflame the guerrillas with the sole goal of destabilizing the area (cf. Address to Diplomatic Corps, 14 Jan. 1984, no. 4). Lastly, it is certain that the sale of arms for profit alone encourages the belligerents.

Whoever loves Africa will at least avoid fanning the embers of violence, or even more will do everything to lead the parties to the wisdom of peace which corresponds to the profound desire of a number of Africans, sufficiently tried at times.

11. Among her many trials, no one can forget the terrible scourge of drought which afflicts many countries in the area of the Sahel and elsewhere. The resultant famine seems to be finally moving the whole world, but, in addition to the urgent help on which the lives of millions of our brothers and sisters depend, everyone knows that from now on we must prepare a more secure future. God has given us enough resources of imagination in our spirit, love in our heart, strength in our arms, and the technical means which will permit us to begin to work that we may emerge from the spirit of fatalism. A sense of responsibility on the part of interested parties with the generous solidarity of their brothers is opening the door to hope. FAO and other organizations are taking this matter to heart. The Apostolic See contributes its initiatives, according to its means; I will speak more about this soon in Nairobi. None of us, however, dares turn away from the distress afflicting the victims of the famine at our side.

12. The sad situation of refugees is unfortunately not limited to Africa. Our planet has tens of millions of refugees, but those of Africa are becoming particularly numerous; their number has probably doubled in the past five years. Here we must once again pay homage to certain international organizations, like the High Commission for Refugees, which follow these problems with a deeply humanitarian sense and greatly contribute to the administration of refugee camps. We also know how much the country of Cameroon has done to grant asylum to the refugees from Equatorial Guinea and especially Chad, and to help in their integration. It will still be necessary, however, to remedy the causes of forced displacement. It is not only famine or life threatening situations which cause people to flee; there is also fear, war and injustice (cf. Address to Diplomatic Corps, 15 Jan. 1983, no. 6). Even if one succeeds in sustaining the material life of a portion of the refugees, the state of moral degradation in which they find themselves, uprooted

from their homeland and without work, remains inhuman. It is desirable that they be integrated as quickly as possible into the economic and social life of the country that receives them. The best solution, however, is their voluntary repatriation, with guarantees of safety, to the country of their origin. I want to bring to your attention as well the innumerable immigrants, whose fate is often as precarious as that of the refugees.

13. There are other plagues which each country, having attained its independence, must try to eliminate. They exist outside Africa with as much or even more gravity. Some countries can well be happy to have put an end to them. They merit, however, that we speak out once again, because too many innocent people are victims, and one feels unable to help them. I would like to lend them my voice. I want to speak about the attacks against human rights, which people everywhere proclaim so strongly. How can we fail to mention the arbitrary imprisonments, condemnations, executions without due process, detention for expressing opinions about inhuman conditions, about tortures and disappearances. Security is invoked; no one can deny the expediency of security measures against the menaces which threaten to unsettle even democratic regimes. However, security is too often invoked unnecessarily, without guarantee of justice and thus even a divergence of political views is already an offence.

Another crying injustice in certain regions of Africa is racial discrimination which rightly arouses the indignation of the world and the Church. It is deplorable to see prolonged the system of apartheid which, by a severe repression, continues to claim too many victims, crushing underfoot a fundamental human right. Finally, among the basic rights of the person, I feel the need to mention once again religious freedom, because I know too many situations where Christians are harassed in the exercise of their worship and in obtaining the necessary means for their formation in the faith. In certain regions of Africa, the Church suffers, for example, by seeing her missionaries expelled or unaccepted, when they come to dedicate their ministry to the service of the local Church which asks for their help, and to that of the peoples who benefit from it: the Church suffers by seeing certain forms of discrimination or suspicion of which the faithful are victims; she suffers by seeing attempts on the life and personal liberty of her priests and men and women religious who witness uniquely to love and peace.

All of these deplorable situations are the fruit of a spirit of violence or greed on the part of a small minority; most often they manifest fear and a lack of maturity. They dishonour those who create them. States proud of their sovereignty must show themselves worthy of their responsibility and understand that they have duties towards their people and to each individual citizen (cf. Discourse to Diplomatic Corps, 14 Jan. 1984, no. 4).

14. In reality whoever loves Africa discerns besides these miseries which are inherently attached to human weakness, a certain number of human, moral and spiritual values which need only to be extended, and Christianity for its part would like to encourage and ennoble them by the grace of the peace and love which comes from Christ. Among other things, Africa can offer the world the

example of generous and untiring hospitality, of the solidarity which exists so strongly among the members of a family or tribe to the point that no one is ever left uncared for, the example of a spontaneous religious sense which renders the invisible familiar. These are the values of which the modern world would have great need in order to counteract the contradictions and snares of a humanism deprived of its fundamental religious dimensions and to achieve a happy coexistence at all the levels of society...

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