



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. Mr ZIA ISPAHANI, NEW AMBASSADOR
OF PAKISTAN TO THE HOLY SEE***

Thursday, 16 November 1995

Mr Ambassador,

I am pleased to accept the Letters of Credence by which you are appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to the Holy See. My thoughts turn to the noble Pakistani people, to whom I wish success in building a just and harmonious society in the framework of peace and security throughout your region of the world. I acknowledge with gratitude your kind words of esteem for the Holy See's efforts to foster peace and to promote the development of all peoples.

In speaking to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See at the beginning of this year, I could not but refer to the "*too many cries of despair and pain*" arising from our brothers and sisters in humanity, crushed by war, injustice, unemployment, poverty and loneliness (cf. John Paul II, *Address to the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See*, 4 [9 Jan. 1995]). While we must all be convinced that peace and reconciliation between peoples is possible, this goal must be sought after with wisdom and worked for with perseverance. Governments and world leaders must be ready to follow the path of mutual respect and dialogue as the only guarantee of humanity's future. Along this path, great efforts must be made to exclude exaggerated nationalism or religious intolerance. These are indeed enemies of peace in the world, for they divide people from one another and raise barriers of mutual fear and mistrust.

On that occasion I also spoke of "*situations where the international community has shown itself to be far-sighted and effective*" (*Ibid.*, 8), situations in which courageous men and women look at one another and listen, and find fitting tools for building societies where diversity is recognized as a source of enrichment. The followers of the various religious traditions have an essential role to

play in fostering a climate of mutual understanding and acceptance. But this happens only when society promotes attitudes and behaviour which lead people to manifest the utmost respect for others and for the very principle of religious freedom. The basis of this right to religious freedom is the dignity of the human person. It is a right which is so fundamental that it precedes civil laws, and all civil authorities are therefore obliged to defend and guarantee it. Your own country, Mr Ambassador, has a tradition of openness to and respect for difference. It is my earnest hope that this tradition will be cherished and safeguarded, in order to avoid unjustifiable bias and discrimination, including discrimination on the basis of religious belief.

While the Catholic community in Pakistan is small in relation to the whole population, its members consider themselves no less Pakistani than other citizens. Christians suffer whenever public attitudes or the legal system itself fail to protect them fully in their status as citizens, as if in some way they were strangers in their own land. At the international level, Pakistan is a signatory to many Conventions and Agreements, including the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantee inalienable human rights, including the right to religious freedom, and which exclude intolerance and discrimination based on religion and belief. More specifically, Pakistani Christians have served their country loyally and effectively from the outset, playing a not insignificant part in the very formation of the country as a sovereign State through their contribution to the Constituent Assembly. They continue to contribute to the life of the nation, most visibly through their educational activities and their assistance to the needy, including refugees. I wish to express the hope that Pakistan will never abandon the path of its democratic ideals and fundamental freedoms, and that all its people will be enabled to share in building a society of justice, mutual trust and cooperation.

I am confident, Mr Ambassador, that you will use all your personal talents and diplomatic skills in order to strengthen the bonds of friendship between Pakistan and the Holy See. As you begin your mission, I offer you wholehearted good wishes and assure you that you will receive attentive and willing help from those who assist me in my ministry and who are therefore dedicated to the service of the international community. May the Most High God sustain you in your task and may he pour out his rich blessings upon the whole Pakistani people.

**Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, vol. XVIII, 2 p.1138-1140.*

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