



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. MR ÓLAFUR EGILSSON
AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF ICELAND
TO THE HOLY SEE***

24 April 1997

Mr Ambassador,

It gives me great pleasure to accept the Letters of Credence by which you are appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Iceland to the Holy See. I am grateful for the good wishes which you have brought from President Ólafur Ragnar Grimsson and from the Government and people of Iceland, and I gladly reciprocate with the assurance of my prayers for your country. Your presence here today is a pleasant reminder of my Pastoral Visit to your country in 1989. During that visit I was able to experience its unique natural beauty and the traditions of hospitality, generosity and love of justice and freedom of which Icelanders are justly proud.

I deeply appreciate your kind remarks regarding the contribution which the Catholic Church has made to the cultural, social and spiritual life of Iceland. By her Divine Founder the Church has been entrusted with a mission that is above all else spiritual and religious, directed to the transcendent and eternal destiny of the human family. While she carries out this mission through her preaching and religious activity, the Church remains at the same time firmly committed to promoting the progress of peoples through the social and educational institutions under her direction. An essential aspect of this work is the forming of people's consciences in the fundamental truths and ethical values which serve as the basis of a society truly worthy of man.

In today's world, a weakening of adherence to such truths and values can constitute a real threat to peaceful coexistence and creative cooperation between peoples and nations, with immediate

and particular interests overshadowing concern for the wider good of the human family as a whole. The Church is convinced that the complex and weighty problems affecting peace in the world can be solved only if people respect the universal moral norms which God has written on the human heart, and only if leaders govern according to them. These norms are humanity's most reliable guide for the authentic renewal of social and political life.

Through its involvement in the international community, the Holy See strives to contribute to a more extensive awareness of certain universal human rights which flow from the very nature of the person, with a corresponding moral duty on the part of everyone to defend and respect them. On the threshold of a new millennium, fresh efforts must be made to guarantee such rights in the laws of nations and in international agreements, especially for the benefit of the most vulnerable and threatened members of society. Care for the homeless, refugees, the handicapped, the elderly and the terminally ill - care based on profound respect for their human dignity - is an authentic measure of civilized life. The Catholic Church will continue to serve the common good through her many educational, social and health-care activities and by forthrightly stating her opposition to attempts to legitimize any actions "contrary to the fundamental principles of absolute respect for life and of the protection of every innocent life" (*Evangelium Vitae*, 72). The Catholics of Iceland are committed to working in harmony with their fellow-citizens for the establishment of a civilization of love, that is, "to build a world of justice, peace and love, where the life and equal dignity of every human being, without discrimination, is defended and sustained" (*Homily*, Reykjavik, 4 June 1989, No. 4).

Another matter to which you have referred, one which has profound moral implications, is the need to find means to overcome the continuing recourse to force as a means of resolving disputes. In order to surmount this spiral of violence, the entire international community must resolutely work to create a climate in which dialogue is accepted as the only viable, responsible and ethical way of defending the rights of peoples and nations. Dialogue however will only be successful if it is also accompanied by specific initiatives designed to curtail the transfer of immense quantities of arms to highly volatile regions. Decisive efforts must be made to stop the immoral and scandalous arms trade which violates international conventions and is closely linked not only to actual conflicts but also to terrorism, organized crime and drug trafficking. Such illicit trade is even more distressing when poorer countries are persuaded to purchase weapons of destruction, while being unable to provide their own citizens with the basic necessities of life. It is my hope that Iceland will continue to raise its voice against the dangers of the arms trade - especially the widespread illicit sale of all types of weapons and military materials - and in favour of legally binding international norms. I wish to repeat what I wrote in my *Message for the 1997 World Day of Peace*: "it is urgently necessary to develop a consistent 'culture of peace', which will forestall and counter the seemingly inevitable outbreaks of armed violence, including taking steps to stop the growth of the arms industry and of arms trafficking" (No. 4).

Mr Ambassador, I am confident that as you fulfil the obligations of your lofty mission the cordial

bonds which exist between the Republic of Iceland and the Holy See will be further strengthened. I offer you my good wishes and assure you that the offices of the Roman Curia will always be ready to assist you. Upon Your Excellency and your fellow-citizens I invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty God.

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